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AUGUST / SEPTEMBER 2023

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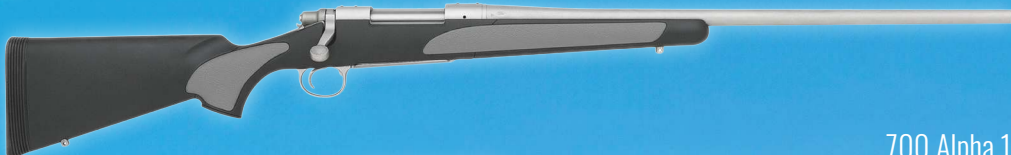
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A WORD FROM THE EDITOR

It's been another challenging couple of months with weather patterns as unsettled as ever, but hopefully you've all managed to get a few trips in between the rain, wind and snow!

The huge news this issue is the release of National's Hunting and Fishing Policy. This is a really big deal, and encompasses so much of what we've been fighting to achieve for many years. Kudos where Kudos is due - Chris Luxon, Todd McLay and their team have taken on board what we've been saying and come up with a really comprehensive policy that sounds pragmatic and sensible and will have big wins for hunters and fishers, game animals, game birds and sports fish, indigenous biodiversity and conservation as well. **This is an opportunity for the win/win we've all been looking for.** Now we'll have to wait and see the results on election night to see if National can deliver on this policy

Make no mistake, this is very early on in the process of recognising valued introduced species in legislation following on from good work in the Te Mana o Te Taiao national biodiversity strategy and Te Ara ki Mua wild animal adaptive management

framework. We do need to sort out the current mishmash of conservation legislation that makes it impossible to map out a pragmatic and achievable path forward for valued introduced species and conservation. There are issues with sections like s4 (2)(b) of the National Parks Act for example, that says all introduced species shall be eradicated as far as possible. This is a virtue signaling provision that has ostensibly achieved nothing other than to deny the opportunity to formulate pragmatic solutions for the conservation of our national parks.

This new emphatic direction announced by National should be a game changer. With the right resolve from the politicians and sensible advice from the various sectors, it is possible now more than ever before!

Some of you may have seen the latest WARO national land schedule review. There are huge issues with some of the changes that have been made here, including absurdities such as opening up the Kaimanawas to uncontrolled WARO. The Department is working with the Sika Foundation to seriously reduce hind numbers in there while leaving the stags for recreational hunters. Now a WARO operator can simply buzz through there

cleaning up all the stags, destroying all the biodiversity gains and goodwill this project has produced so far. There are areas in the South Island high country recently made public due to tenure review, that have now been opened up to WARO while still remaining closed to recreational hunting. There are other heavily recreationally hunted and readily accessible areas that have also now been opened up to WARO. **All this conflict is so unnecessary, and was done by the DOC concessions division working in a silo, not by Ben Reddiex and the wild animal management team who should have been heavily involved in this process.** Absolutely absurd, and does not help trying to get hunters and Department working together constructively.

We MUST highlight that WARO is an important part of the 'concerted action' mix needed for game animal management, but only when co-ordinated with rec hunting under the 'complimentary' (FWF) management model; not the 'competitive' conflict driving management model (that results almost everywhere else under this new WARO schedule).

The Departments tahr control for the year started in July, so please be aware you may well encounter culling operations in tahr country for the next couple of months. Go to the DOC website to get the most up to date information.

Greg

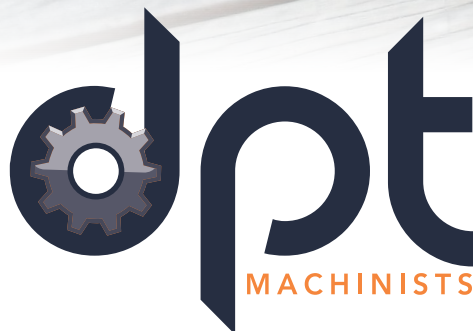
SPOT THE LOGO

The winners for last issue are **Jake Dagger** and **Heather Nelson**. Logos appeared on page 29, the Rab advert, and page 33 the Beretta advert.

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INTRIGUE 02338 - 03/22

Q&A

HI GREG

I'm just starting to get into my alpine hunting and loving it.

I'm running a 243 at moment and think it's time to get something a bit bigger. What calibre do you recommend, and what scope to go on it. Just trying to get a better idea before spending heaps of money.

CHEERS, JACK

HI JACK

A 243 will do most things if you point it in the right direction and don't expect more than what its capable of. Big animals at long range like Red stags or bull tahr are not what it is going to excel at – fullstop. Stick to smaller to medium sized game animals out to 300yds and the 243 will work just fine, If you want to do more than that, and still want to keep recoil manageable out of a light weight alpine rifle, then I'd consider something like the 6.5 or 7mm PRCs – especially if you're going to use factory ammo. The very good Hornady Precision Hunter line does make these two chamberings come alive. Scope-wise its pretty hard to go past a Swarovski Z5 or a Leupold VX5 for the best features for the lightest weight. With higher powered optics its very much a case of buy once, cry once!

CHEERS, GREG

HI GREG

I'm thinking of rebarreling my 270wsm and I'm not sure how short I could get away with.

I've seen some of your "Superpigs" and wondering what your thoughts would be. Hardy have a 1:9 twist carbon barrel that I think may be a good option? I don't want to shoot past 600m. And lastly, could you recommend a powder for reloading with your suggestions on the above. I'm pretty keen on trying the Nosler LRAB in both 150 and 165gn maybe? Feel free to give any recommendations there too.

REGARDS, GEOFF

HI GEOFF

Basically what we've learnt over the years is you can go as short as you want. Yes, you will lose velocity, but depending on your individual hunting situation you may well be prepared to compromise a bit (or a lot!) to get a more compact and less cumbersome rifle – especially if fitting a suppressor and adding another 3 to 4 inches to your barrel length. On something like a 270WSM, you could certainly run with a 20 inch barrel and still get good performance suitable for out to 500 yards or so. You would need a 1:9" twist minimum for the 165gn to 170gn class 270 projectiles, and if you want the lightest weight barrel around then a carbon wrapped barrel is worth considering. The Nosler LRABs are a very good hunting projectile but some cannot get them to shoot in their rifles.

With a 150gn projectile I'd try Reloder 26, which should give you around 3150fps out of a 24 inch barrel and 3000fps out of a 20 inch. With the 165gn I'd try Reloder 33 or Vihtvouri N570, which should give you around 3050fps out of the 24 inch and 2900fps from a 20 inch.

CHEERS, GREG

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WRITTEN BY ~ SHAY ROBINSON

CHASIN THE DREAM

A woman with a large red backpack and a stag head on top, standing on a mountain trail. She is wearing a green long-sleeved shirt, dark pants, and a cap. She is holding a walking stick. The background shows a mountain range with snow-capped peaks under a clear blue sky.

SPOTTING A BIG RED STAG IN THE WILD FOR THE FIRST TIME IS AN UNFORGETTABLE EXPERIENCE

Before I started my hunting journey, I went on countless hiking trips but had never encountered anything bigger than a possum. So, when I finally saw an old roaring stag, I couldn't believe how majestic he was.

It was so captivating watching him. I started to understand how lucky we are in Aotearoa New Zealand, and why it's so important we protect and manage these big game animals. It also triggered the start of a dream that would eventually turn into reality two years later.

At the beginning, when I thought about

taking my first stag, I felt this sense of determination and excitement. I would soak up all the knowledge the Great Dane Emil would share with me and watch countless episodes of NZ Hunter Adventures. **I may be biased, but that show is terrific.** I was lucky to be surrounded by people who were willing to share their wisdom and experiences with me.

I would try to apply my learnings and test myself on each trip. I'd train to get my fitness up and slowly adapt to walking up gnarly hills with a heavy pack of hunting gear. I would also assess each animal's



age and state as we came across them, and double-check my analysis with Emil. Even though I knew I was on the right track, sometimes I'd spiral into a state of self-doubt and hesitancy. I was new to the hunting game and wondered how many mountains I'd have to climb or how many big trips I'd have to tick off until I'd be worthy enough to shoot my first mature stag.

THE JOURNEY TO THE MIGHTY WEST COAST

In May last year, Emil told me about a potential trip with Willie and Greg

to the West Coast. I was super keen and asked Emil what we were looking for. When he said it was a post-rut Red stag hunt, I was sold. During the days of planning, I started to feel nervous. Partially because I knew the trip would be filmed for the whole country to see, but also because I found myself second-guessing my abilities. But then I thought about all the hard work I'd put in and the lessons I'd learnt along the way. I told myself I was ready.

So, we packed all our gear up for a few days in the hills and hit the road with Gunner the four-legged legend. We

made our way up the river in the truck, which I was grateful for, as it meant I could save my legs for the big walk ahead. If you're on a trip with the Duleys and Emil, you know you need to put in the mahi to keep up.

There was snow on the mountains and the weather looked great.

Looking out the window I wondered if a big old stag was waiting out there for me, and I was excited to see if there were any chamois wandering around too. Once we chucked the packs on and crossed the icy cold rivers into the valley, the mission was on.



One of the many river crossings on the way in



After a few hours making our way up, we spotted a few chamois does and kids which was promising. **We powered on but by the end of the first day no deer had been seen.** So, we searched for the flattest tussock area we could find, which was challenging being on a narrow hillside. Eventually, we set up camp, and I was looking forward to a good sleep. Even if it meant rolling into Emil or having big tussocks dig into my back.

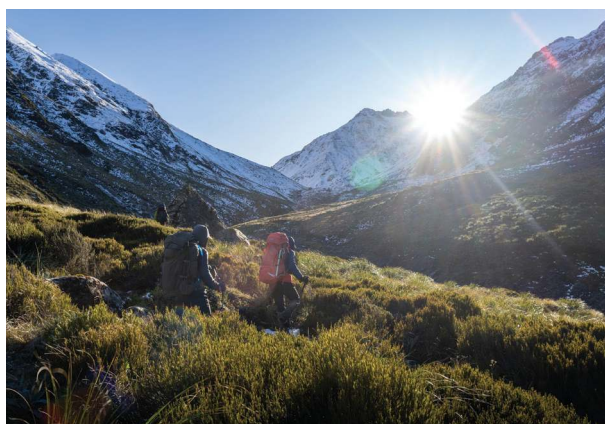
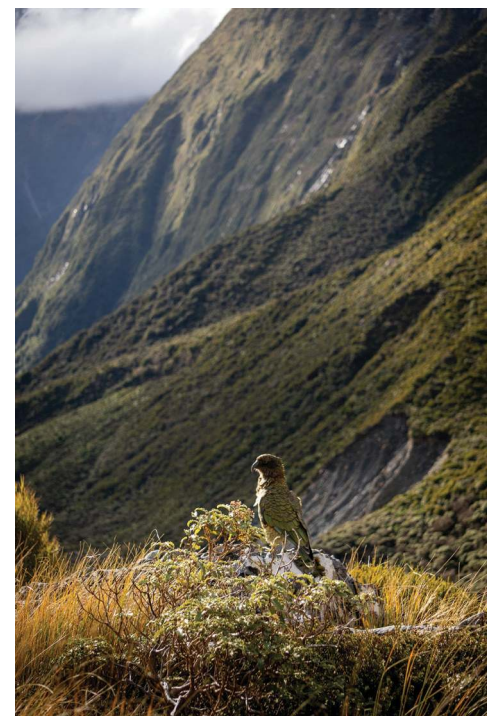
Waking up in the hills on a calm morning and seeing the sun rise is always a treat. After glassing with Gunner lying next to us, we made our way up to the pass into the warmer West Coast terrain. There was still a bit of altitude to climb. Just before we reached the pass, Willie caught a glimpse of another chamois buck about 200 metres from us and whipped out the spotter. We felt the rush of excitement, but on closer inspection, we made the



The West Coast in sight

call to leave him as he was smaller than my last one and just shy of ten inches. In a few more years, he would grow into an amazing buck.

As we crossed into the West Coast, the scenes were incredible. It looked like great deer country ahead, with plenty of slips to look into and lush vegetation for animals to feed on. It's those stunning views that make you feel connected to the environment, and you realise



how important it is to play your part in conserving it. The sun was shining, and we were buzzing to see what other animals we would come across. Even though we were yet to see any deer, I was just grateful to be there.

Dropping our way down the western side, we parked up for lunch and I was stoked to find that the lads had carried in Cured bier sticks made by my uncle, with meat from my Fallow buck shot in the previous year. That night we finally saw three young stags, which was a relief. After finally spotting some deer, there was a growing sense of anticipation. It was the perfect area to find an old stag feeding up after the rut. The next day I was so excited to get

cracking into the morning hunt. The weather was perfect, and the company wasn't too bad either. Glassing is one of my favourite things to do, and with that much country to look at, I was fizzing. We had set up a basecamp, meaning we had all day to scope out the valley for a stag with an easy return. It felt like the stars were aligning.

DISASTER STRIKES

Unfortunately, when you're out in the mountains, you never know when things can take a turn for the worse, and it's often when you least expect it. As we darted up rocks along the river, I slipped on wet moss and twisted my leg before falling towards

the water. Luckily Emil caught my pack just before I fell in, but it didn't stop the searing pain from my ankle. I knew instantly there was something wrong. Each time I tried to stand up, I would buckle in pain. The shock started, and I couldn't hold in the tears for long.

It was a mixture of disappointment, agony, and failure. I felt like I had let the team down, and to make matters worse, the whole ordeal was being filmed. I tried to put on a brave face for the camera, while feeling the rush of emotions and sharp bolts of pain. It helped that Emil managed the situation with ease, despite my frustrations and incessant swearing. Like the true hero he is, he chucked me on his back and carried me all the way back to camp.

Willie continued on to scope out the area while Greg, Emil and I assessed the situation. I was hopeful that it was just a rolled ankle and that it would be all right within a few hours. **I heard on the radio that Willie had spotted a mob of stags, and that made me try so hard to power through the pain, but my ankle just wouldn't play ball.**

Luckily, I had the best crew with me and we came into the trip prepared. We coordinated a pick-up with a local helicopter operator via the Inreach. It was a tough call to make but we knew there was bad weather coming in, and there was a risk that it might be more dangerous trying to get out injured. I was grateful for that quick exit and tried to distract myself by enjoying the views from the chopper.

After a nerve-wracking hospital wait, I was sent home to recover with torn ligaments on both sides of my ankle. I spent the following days dosed up on pain



As I saw the big stag drop, I felt a wave of relief and happiness. After all the miles, multiple trips, and a battered ankle, the perseverance had paid off

medication, replaying the moments in my mind right before the slip. I felt frustrated with myself and embarrassed knowing it would go to air on TV. It probably didn't help that I was on crutches, strapped in a moon boot and couldn't drive for six weeks. The simple daily tasks were a struggle for a while, and all I could think about was how I'd messed up such an incredible opportunity to prove myself. **Maybe I just wasn't ready for the big dream stag after all.**

As the months of recovery went on, I was determined to get back on my feet. I missed being out in nature, and I knew antlers were going to drop soon as the season was coming to an end. I knew the risks with ligament damage, and that it could take a long time to fully repair, so I listened to my physio and worked on my exercises to ensure I wouldn't get stuck with a life-long niggly injury. I slowly got back into training, going on day hikes and bouldering at the climbing gym to build my strength and confidence again. It's crazy how much an injury can knock you back in different ways.

THE REDEMPTION

The thing about hunting is that it keeps you coming back for more. The

dreamed about.

On the walk in, my ankle was holding up well. The boys would ask how I was doing and although I felt confident, I wondered what else could possibly go wrong this time. But the mountains were as beautiful as ever and being out there again felt invigorating. As we got to the tops, hours went by without locating any animals. At that stage I had given in to whatever would unfold and was glad I had proven I could keep up again.

It wasn't until we looked down into one of the last catchments that we spotted him. My heart began to race. I could see through the binos that he had a good set of antlers and looked old enough to shoot. Willie and I made our way down the hill to get closer, trying hard not to spook the stag. **The nerves really started to kick in when Emil and Kieran set up the cameras.** I was so close to achieving this big goal and had been through the wars to get there, so I didn't want to mess it up on film yet again.

I got comfortable behind the gun and did some dry fires to try to settle the nerves. We could see the stag was about 600 metres away and had a unique set of

antlers; three on one top and two on the other with no beys. He was the perfect cull and looked to be between eight or nine years old. I loaded the rifle, and he stood up. It was all on. But the one thing many people don't realise about filming for the show is that you must wait for the cameras to be ready too.

It's a tricky dance watching the animal through the scope, getting ready for a good shot to take, but also waiting to hear the word "rolling" to know the boys are ready. It's challenging when you have it lined up perfectly, but then the animal starts moving just as the cameras are rolling, and you need to reset your position again.

As I was getting ready to shoot, I knew Willie was on the spotter and Emil had his camera ready, but I couldn't tell how far Kieran had wandered off. During this critical moment, as the stag was up and standing broadside, I had the perfect shot but we didn't know where Kieran was. I thought at that moment, that it was over. The stag was going to be spooked. But a few seconds later, Kieran popped up on a ridge to the right with camera at the ready. We were back on. I took a breath, focused and pulled the trigger.

As I saw the big stag drop, I felt a wave of relief and happiness. After all the miles, multiple trips, and a battered ankle, the perseverance had paid off. We all couldn't stop smiling. I gave my share of smart remarks to Kieran about his sudden disappearance at such a critical moment, but as this was his first filming trip, we let him off lightly.

We dropped down to where he lay in the grass, and as we got closer, I had tears well up in the corners of my eyes. It was a memory I won't forget. I was in awe of the stag's beauty, was thankful for the crew who believed in me and I



Finally, success for Shay and Emil

made Emil proud. It was the right call to shoot a cull stag that had lived a good long life in the mountains. He was a real character head, and I felt privileged to take him. As we started harvesting the meat, Emil and I started planning how best to utilise the different cuts. It seemed like our favourite, spaghetti bolognese, was first on the menu. Sourcing your own food must be one of the most satisfying results of hunting.

After celebrating with a mulled wine that night, we slept under the stars and made our way out the next morning with a nice set of antlers strapped to my pack.

On the way, Emil spotted a yearling hind close by. We knew we needed to harvest the hinds as well as the stags to ensure the habitat remained healthy, so he made the decision to fire. I sensed some subtle competition in shooting accuracy and was chuffed to find my shot was more precise. It was a great end to a victorious trip.

Chasing the dream of hunting my first big Red stag has been an adventure full of ups and downs. I learned the hard way that you're at the mercy of Mother Nature when out in the mountains, and anything can happen. You can learn all there is to know about hunting, but you aren't invincible, and you have to be prepared. Even though you can't control what happens in those



Heavy packs for the walk out

situations, you can control how you respond to them.

The power of maintaining a positive mindset is so often underestimated. I went through a whirlwind of emotions after my injury but, in the end, I came out on top and even wiser than before. While filming the second half of the episode, I wanted to show others that if you're determined, you can come back from mishaps and challenges that knock you down. Even when those feelings of

self-doubt creep in, tell yourself you're capable and keep on pushing through. Who knows, you might out-shoot your more experienced partner too!

The beauty of the mountains, seeing those big, majestic game animals in the wild, and playing my part in conservation is what motivated me to get back out there. Taking my first mature Red stag was just the icing on the cake.



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MORE INFO

SO YOU WANT TO BE A PROFESSIONAL HUNTER? GUIDING

WRITTEN BY ~ JOSEPH PETER

For many young men and woman the dream of being paid to hunt keeps them up at night, and why shouldn't it? If you dream of being outdoors and being paid to do what you love, that is surely the dream job

In its most basic definition, being a 'professional hunter' (PH) means you are paid to hunt, but hunting has many faces both here and internationally, so there is no standardised form of the PH, and the role changes over time.

Here in New Zealand this job has taken many forms and continues to change to this day.

When our game populations were established in the early 20th century the first PHs were guides. Men like Jim Muir are synonymous with the early guiding industry and the halcyon days of deer stalking in this country. The role of the PH in New Zealand soon changed from that of guide, to the predominant position of the infamous 'deer culler'. From the 1930s through to the 1970s

this role took many shapes, with some hunters being paid by the government to simply shoot-to-kill, some chasing the skin market, and others working on tail bounties. Later in this period the focus shifted towards filling chillers and freezers for the international meat market. My grandfathers worked in various forms of professional hunting during this time. **As technology caught up with the hunting industry, helicopter recovery took over,** and by the 1980s, helicopter hunting for the meat market became the standard form of 'professional hunting'.

During my generation, the role of the PH has shifted again and falls into a couple of main categories.

The 'Guide'- This is the original form of professional hunting in New Zealand and has always existed in some form since our game was introduced. The main

role is assisting recreational clients on a successful hunting trip.

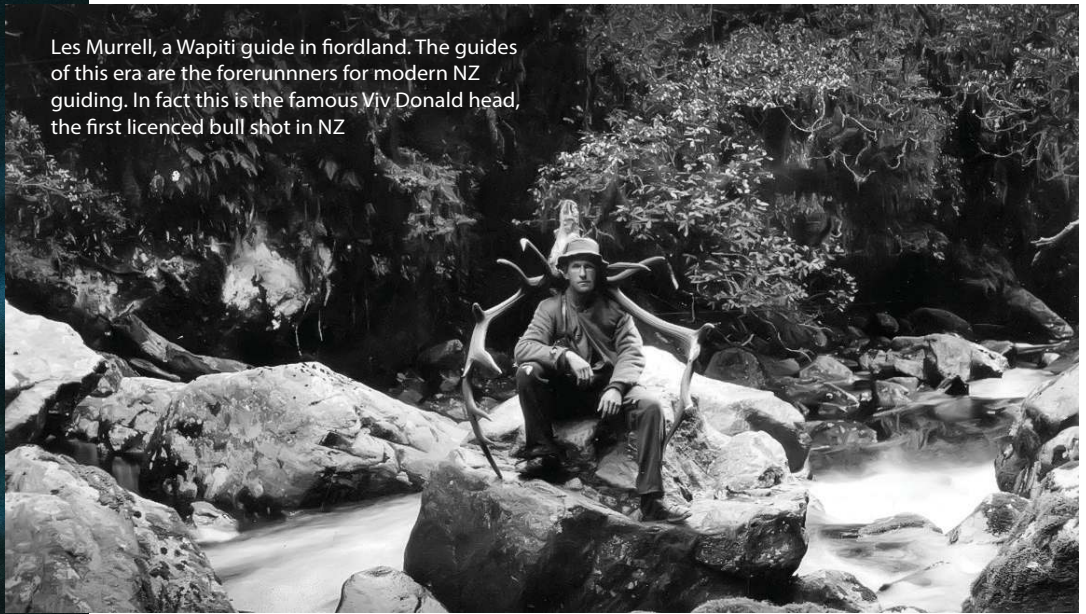
One of the most renowned forms of professional hunting in New Zealand is known as the "culler." While this profession still exists today, it is not as prevalent as it was in the past. The primary job is controlling wild game populations through hunting, working either directly for the government, through a contractor, or for private land owners. **Helicopters and poison operations are now an integral part of this industry.**

The 'trapper'- a role that has been around as long as 'possums have been a legal target. (there was a time they were protected!) While the role began as trapping for fur, there is an increasing scope and job market for targeting our small predators; cats and mustelids.

Fortunately, I was able to enter the world of guided hunting at a young age through my uncle's business. Since then, it has become a significant part of my life and has been my primary source of income as an outfitter for almost my entire life. **So this issue we'll be talking about guiding.**

I get a number of enquiries every year

Les Murrell, a Wapiti guide in fiordland. The guides of this era are the forerunners for modern NZ guiding. In fact this is the famous Viv Donald head, the first licenced bull shot in NZ



Rex Forrester, an early modern guide, in his 1965 book 'Hunter For Hire'



Skin hunters in the Rakaia, from Joff Thompson's 1952 book 'Deer Hunter'



from young men and women wanting to get into the industry, so I thought I would share some real-life experience of what it is like.

THE ROLE

What does a professional hunting guide actually do?

There seems to be a bit of mysticism and romanticism attached to the hunting industry, but the simple reality is we take people hunting - nothing more and nothing less. The term 'outfitter' refers to the person who owns and runs a guiding business and who employs guides. The guides are the ones who are taking clients day to day on their hunting trips.

In New Zealand, the vast majority of this industry operates 'behind wire'. The typical outfit has some form of lodge or base camp, and a fenced hunting 'estate' where the guided hunts take place. A smaller proportion of the industry operates in a free-range setting,



An ibex hunt in Kazakstan that came about through my involvement in guiding

with a mixture of hunts on private or public land.

An average day for a guide involves getting up and helping clients with breakfast and sorting gear, hunting during

the day, and then back to camp or lodge at night to help with dinner and trophy and meat processing. The vast majority is being conducted within a controlled environment (ie a game park setting).



Many NZ guides travel to the northern hemisphere for their season as well



It doesn't have to be all huge estate stags, there's a lot of satisfaction in being able to take people out for their first deer and involve them in the whole process

In New Zealand the main guiding 'season' runs from March through to July, with some outfitters running nearly all year long with meat hunts or other tourist activities.

This industry is geared toward 'trophy hunting' and primarily is focused on international hunting markets. Your job as a guide is helping the client find and secure their trophy animal, which is often a 'once in a lifetime' experience for them.

Although you get to hunt day in and day out for nearly half the year, you are not hunting for yourself, and you sacrifice your own hunting for the job. Do you get jealous when a mate shoots a big stag? Or would you rather see someone else have

success on their trip? This is something you need to think about before entering into the world of guiding.

THE PEOPLE

The guiding industry is a service industry, and that means you work for the clients. Although our job is 'hunting' the main role is looking after clients and meeting their expectations of the hunt (not our own). A good guide will be able to get along with their clients, regardless of their backgrounds, and be able to read their expectations and ability on the hunt and tailor the hunt to them. Every client is different, and there is no

point trying to climb to the furthest ridge to shoot the biggest animal if your client simply does not have the physical ability to do so. The hunting industry in New Zealand is relatively easygoing, allowing people of varying abilities to find success. However, it is still the guide's responsibility to ensure that the hunt is carried out in the most optimal way for the client. I believe one of the best qualities of a guide is the ability to relate to clients, regardless of how the hunt pans out. A good guide can keep a client happy during an unsuccessful hunt, as easily as a bad guide can turn a successful trip into a shit show. How will you behave after your client misses the perfect shot after a three-hour stalk? When the client wounds multiple animals, and you spend days tracking wounded game? When your client constantly moans about the weather or the hunt not being what they expected?

These situations are often the reality of a guide's job, and how you react when things AREN'T going to plan really shows what type of guide you are. Patience is extremely important in this industry, and keeping a positive attitude, regardless of how things are evolving, will make the difference between success and failure.

You will meet people from all walks of life. This is one of the great things about the job. You will soon gather a good knowledge of hunting internationally, and will get to meet some amazing people. I am lucky to have met great friends through my job as a guide.

THE GAME

A hunting guide obviously needs a good understanding of the game they hunt, but with the way the industry is here in New Zealand (estate hunting) you do not need to be some super master hunter. Good basic hunting skills (and sticking to the basics) are generally all a guide needs, and this combined with a good hunting area should result in reliable, successful hunts. One area of the hunting industry in New Zealand that needs improvement is game management. Unfortunately, this knowledge gap exists across all sectors of the industry. I do hope we can get better training and better knowledge around real game management in the future, as this will benefit all sectors of our hunting

By far and away the industry is geared towards 'trophy hunting', with clients seeking animals of a set size. The bulk of the game park industry is well set up to cater for this, with many 'systems' in place to ensure clients get the right animal, but the standards and ethics soon seem to go to the wayside when outfits operate

outside of their game parks and move on to public land that they have to share with the public. This is something that needs to be led by better guides and outfitters seeking more sustainable hunting practices. I believe being honest with clients about how hunts are conducted is paramount to a good operation. Clients are not stupid, and lies soon get caught out.

THE PLACES

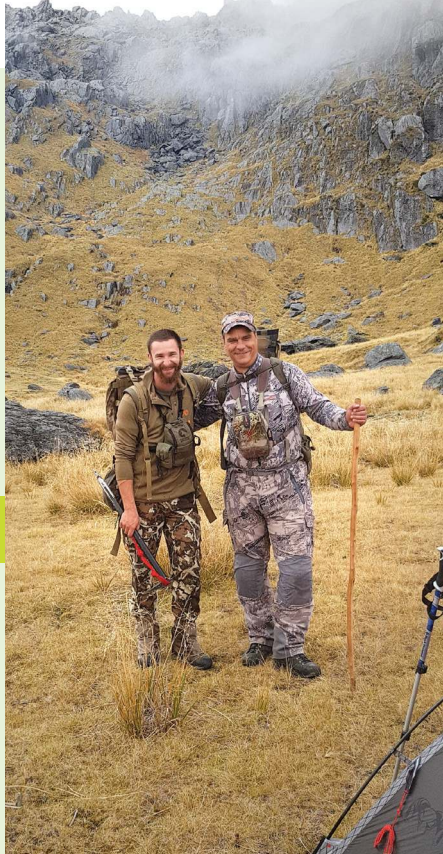
One of the biggest benefits to working as a guide are the opportunities to travel and explore the world that come with it. Hunting guiding is found across the globe and is a seasonal occupation. This means that many guides travel the world to fit two or three different seasons into their hunting calendar. Due to the seasonal nature of the job, it might actually be easier for you to do some of your own hunting internationally, rather than try and cram in your hunting between guiding work at home. In my short time in the industry, I have been lucky enough to travel to North America twice for guiding opportunities and to central Asia for a personal hunt. These are trips, I would never be able to afford if I had had to pay for them at retail value.

THE PAY

The hunting industry has a bit of a bad reputation for taking advantage of young hunters by underpaying them and promising them the world.

Before entering the industry, it's important to have a clearly defined pay and work contract. Your time is valuable, regardless of the fact that you get to hunt for work. Make sure you are getting your worth, and keep an eye on minimum pay rates and hourly rates. Working very long hours while guiding is not unusual, with 12+ hour days being the norm.

That said, once you get established with a good outfitter and good clients, there are opportunities to make reasonable money. Most experienced guides in New Zealand should be earning around \$300-400 per day, plus tips and gear allowances from outfitters. The latter part of this can add up to a significant amount. In general, this type of work tends to be seasonal. Therefore, it's crucial to have other



You will meet people from all walks of life. This is one of the great things about the job



You will have the opportunity to introduce people to hunting, as well as guide experienced and well-travelled hunters

sources of income or a part-time job to ensure stability in the long run.

Guiding itself is a "young man's" game, and most guides will work a few years in the industry in their 20's and move on to other careers, or step up into the world of outfitting. Running a business and outfitting is not at all the same as being a guide, and comes with a whole new set of requirements and responsibilities.

Working as a hunter for a living sounds quite appealing. You receive decent pay, get to travel and explore various places, and hunt daily. What's not to love? I would say the biggest challenge

with working in this hunting industry is family life and relationships. You will often be away for months at a time, and when the season is on, you are working full time. That means no days off, no sick days, and missed birthdays, anniversaries and family life. As a young person these things are not such a big deal, but if you want to have kids and a stable relationship these things can become quite taxing. So bear that in mind if you wish to step into this career. **Despite these challenges I love what I do for a living and am lucky to be able to explore amazing places and share those experiences with great people from around the world.**





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RIVER SAFETY THINGS A HUNTER MUST KNOW PART FOUR

WRITTEN BY ~ MIKE SPRAY

I remember when I was very young, maybe around six or seven, news came of our neighbour who had drowned while crossing a river on a hunting trip near Taupo

Despite my age, the event must have had quite an impact on me. I saw our neighbour as a huge, strong adventure man who hunted deer and caught marlin. How could he have drowned?

I remember all these people turning up at my neighbour's house, where there was a great deal of sadness, and my mother spending a lot of time there, consoling the family and helping them, as arrangements were made for the funeral. I knew my father was also very sad during this time as he was very quiet as he tended to me and my siblings. Ever since then, I have known rivers were dangerous and as I grew up and started exploring the back country with my rifle, I was already acutely aware that rivers were one of our greatest hazards.

This article aims to share with you the principles of river safety, how to identify river hazards and the thinking process that should be applied every time you want to cross a river. It is important to know how to

cross a river safely and equally important to know when not to cross.

RIVER CHARACTERISTICS

Generally, rivers will drain large catchment areas, and therefore when it rains, they can rise very quickly, thus immensely increasing the volume and power of the water. Most river crossing incidents occur in flooded rivers. Rivers can have a wide or narrow flow depending on the terrain. They can be shallow with fast-moving water causing areas of rapids, or deep slow-moving water which may conceal unforeseen hazards beneath. Regardless, rivers should never be underestimated and should always be respected.

Even the most placid-looking side stream can become hazardous. Side streams often drop steeply where you can find waterfalls, gorges, areas of fast-flowing water and deep cold pools. Navigating side streams should also be done with a wary and respectful approach.

RIVER DYNAMICS

Eddies have water circling out of the

main current and back up the river.

They can occur at the riverbank or behind a big boulder in the middle of the river. The eddy line is where the water flowing downstream meets the water flowing up. Eddies can trap a person making it very difficult to break free across the eddy line. It is wise to avoid eddies when crossing a river.

Obstacles are objects such as boulders or fallen trees which force the current around the object and sometimes under it. If forced into an obstacle, they can cause injury or even force a person down underneath. Again, be wary of obstacles downstream and plan to avoid them.

Strainers are particularly hazardous. These are obstructions in the river where water can flow through but a large object such as a person will be caught, say between two boulders or the forks of overturned tree roots. Strainers have the potential to entrap people in the force of the water, making it impossible to break free.

There are several other river hazards, such as rapids, standing waves, buffer waves and undercut riverbanks. It is important to be able to identify all of these as they all present their own unique dynamic when encountered. **Water Safety NZ offers very good explanations of all types of river dynamics.** It is worth researching these further.



Use a pole when crossing solo, placing it firmly against the ground on the upstream side



The mutual support method works best when you have a team

DECISION MAKING

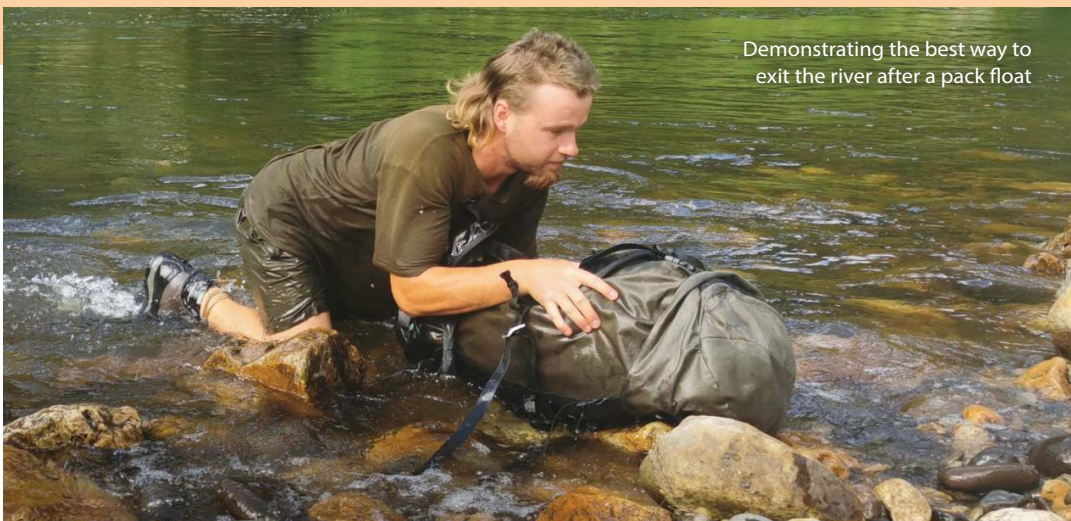
The decisions you make at the edge of the river, whether alone and going through it in your own mind, or having a discussion with your group, may well determine a safe or unsafe outcome.

The best way to make good decisions is not to put yourself behind a flooded river. If you've crossed rivers on your way into a hunting area, be mindful of being back across them before significant rain. Also, consider that South Island rivers are primarily snowmelt-fed in spring and summer. If you crossed a river in the early morning on the way in, it will likely be considerably higher if you're planning to cross it in the evening, as it has the heat of the day to melt snow.

DO WE CROSS?

Ask, can we cross safely at this spot?

Assess the river, identifying potential hazards, the strength of the current, depth of the water, the nature of the river bottom, and is the crossing within your and your group's capability. **You can throw a stick into the water and if it carries faster than you can walk**



Demonstrating the best way to exit the river after a pack float

alongside then the current it is too swift for you to cross. If there is any doubt, look for an alternative crossing point. Check your map for an area where the river may be wider and shallower with less current. If the river is swollen and dirty in colour, then do not cross. That may mean camping up and waiting for the river to drop. Be mindful that glacial-fed rivers' beautiful azure milky blue can fool your perception of its depth and hide obstacles.

WHERE DO WE CROSS?

Identify entry, exit and retreat points

that are safe for you to enter and leave. Your retreat point may be downstream of your entry point so ensure this is also safe. Choose a place to cross where the river is straight. Water will be deeper and flow faster on the outside of a river bend. Ideally, the river should be shallow, with slow-moving water and across a smooth gravel bed. Think carefully about crossing a river above the thigh height of the shortest person. The potential to be swept away increases with the depth of the river. If you are swept off your feet, is there an area downstream where you will be able to recover safely? Consider



Supporting each other on a crossing is recommended



If you know you have multiple river crossings on a big trip then it could be wise to throw a pair of crocs in for your party to share. Bare feet is not advised.

Glacial rivers can be very discoloured, even a long way down the catchment. This makes it difficult to evaluate depth



if this area may put you in more danger and find an alternative crossing. There are often crossing points that appear great above rapids, but with no viable recovery area, they are too dangerous to consider.

Be wary of gravel beds that angle steeply downstream away from you, as they may be shallow at the beginning but against the far bank they will likely be deeper. To retreat you will have to push up against the flow, exhausting at best, dangerous at worst.

and loosen the shoulder straps so you can slip out of your pack easily should you need to. Keep your waist belt done up, as this will stop the pack from riding up if you fall.

Communicate with the group so everyone knows the entry, exit, retreat and recovery points. Decide on the crossing method before entering the water. When carrying a firearm and, depending on the difficulty of the crossing, you could carry it in your hands or it may be better to strap it to the side of your pack. Either way, ensure your firearm is unloaded.

PREPARING TO CROSS

It is wise to keep your boots on. They will provide stability and secure footing and protect your feet from injury. If you want to keep your hunting boots dry, wear other closed footwear. Never cross in bare feet. Loose clothing such as over trousers or rainwear will increase drag. It is best to remove these and carry them in your pack.

Make sure the contents of your pack are inside a sealed waterproof liner. You will want to keep the contents of your pack dry, especially clothing and sleeping bag, which you may want to keep in another dry bag inside the liner. If you do fall over the sealed pack liner will provide buoyancy, should you need to use your pack for flotation. Unfasten your chest straps

HOW TO CROSS?

There are two crossing methods, solo and mutual support. Mutual support exactly describes this method, and it is the recommended option if you are with a group with varying levels of experience or if the crossing necessitates mutual support.

For the solo method, you will need a sturdy pole about two metres in length that will support your weight. This will act as a third leg providing you with additional stability when crossing. Hold the pole diagonally across your body and place it about one metre upstream. Place it firmly into the riverbed and lean weight on it. Keep your body side on to the current.

Do not lift your feet or pole out of the water, but shuffle through the water moving your feet and the pole one at a

time. For each step and pole placement, ensure the footing is secure before the next movement. It is best to strap your rifle to the side of your pack or sling it over your downstream shoulder to easily remove it if you get into trouble. You will need both hands to hold and move the pole effectively.

You will find the solo method increases your stability markedly compared to just shuffling across the river on your feet. It is a great idea to practice this method whenever you get the opportunity.

The mutual support method is used for two or more party members to provide support should someone lose their balance. It is worthwhile for the group to practice on dry land first before entering the river.

The strongest person should be positioned upstream to break the force of the water for the group, and if there are more than two people, another strong person should be positioned on the downstream end to provide maximum stability.

When carrying a pack, the chest strap should be released, the shoulder straps loosened, and the waist strap remains fastened. Each person can now reach around between the person's back and their pack to grasp the hip belt or pack strap. This will keep the group bound together and provide mutual support and stability to cross the river. The upstream person should coordinate the crossing. If someone loses their footing, support them until they regain their feet. Firearms should be strapped upright to the side of the pack.

If the group is not wearing packs, apply the same configuration and grasp your neighbour's hunting belt or clothing.

RETREATING

Should you or any members of your group become uncomfortable about the crossing, then it is best to make the decision to retreat before moving too far into the river.

Retreating using the solo method is to switch hands on your pole, leaving the pole anchored upstream and move around the pole to face back toward your entry point.

To retreat as a group, the upstream person will communicate instructions to back out, watching feet placement carefully or to initiate a caterpillar turn. To do this, the downstream person remains as an anchor and beginning with the upstream person, the group stays connected until all the group turn around to face back toward their entry point. Identify an exit point and coordinate movement toward it.



Bridges provide the safest crossing in the back country

RECOVERY

Self-rescue may be necessary if you or a group lose their footing and end up in the water. This is why it is important to identify a recovery exit point before you enter the river. If you are crossing solo and fall, then try falling back onto your pack for floatation. Row with your arms and use your legs as if you were riding a bicycle. If you are feet first, you can fend off obstacles as you peddle downstream toward your exit. If you are headfirst, your pack will protect your head from hitting any objects.

If you are crossing using mutual support and the group falls, try to stay together and fall backwards onto your packs. Apply the same bicycle peddling and arm row to propel the group toward the exit. If the group separates, then apply the same method as if you were crossing solo. If your pack does compromise your safety then slip out of it, but don't let it go and risk losing all your gear downriver. Ride your pack on your front, kicking to propel yourself until you reach the bank. Your pack will be heavy, so move it onto shore by lifting and pushing it forward until it is well out of the water. Only stand when you and your pack are completely out of the river.

AFTER CROSSING

Many New Zealand rivers can be extremely cold, especially in winter. Monitoring your own condition and the condition of your group is really important. Warm up by having a hot drink, change into dry clothes and rest. It is also a good idea to check the contents of your pack to ensure the liner has remained sealed and your gear is still dry.

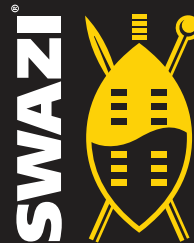


Be mindful of river crossings on your route out, if rain hits the rivers will rise

FINALLY

Rivers bring a special beauty to the New Zealand outdoors. They offer hunters convenient access routes and favourable places to hunt. However, they always need to be treated with respect. A gentle flow can turn into a raging torrent within a few minutes. Watch the weather and plan your trip to account for crossing rivers. There is reliable information about river safety on the internet and in publications. **Prior research and knowledge about rivers and river safety will better prepare you, and with practice, you will feel a lot more confident and capable when you approach a river to cross.**





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LEFT NEXEN RODIAN MTX TYRE IMAGE: Machine sidewall design
RIGHT NEXEN ROADIAN MTX TYRE IMAGE: Beast sidewall design

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PART SIX BUSH PIGLET

WRITTEN BY ~ LUKE CARE

The Bush Piglet far outside its natural environment

The final phase of the Howa Mini Action build was to get as light as we can – and to go hunting!

STOCK

The first step was the stock – the last of many options we've trialed with this action, it's certainly customizable! Howa have now released a range of carbon stocks for numerous rifles in their line; offering the Superlite (a brand new action to sit between the mini action and the short action – but only in chrome moly for the moment), the Elevate, to pair with a carbon-wrapped barrel, and the Stalker – the carbon stock Mini Action.

This now gives us two options for the Mini Action. The Kroseg Precision we profiled last issue and the Stalker profiled this issue. See the attached photos for a comparison between the two.

The new stock weighs in at an impressive 450 grams, and comes in three colour options – Kryptek camo, grey with black webbing or green with black webbing, all with a soft touch finish. It has a shorter length of pull and a smaller pistol grip, so more suitable for Sam and other smaller shooters. It

has a lower comb too, better suited for standing shots which are most common with a bush rifle. It is also suitable to receive a Spartan gunsmith adaptor if you wanted to go down that road.

These stocks are produced by Stocky is the US and are our first view at any of their offerings. They're a well-shaped stock, with a nice short forend, actually shorter even than the Kroseg – both of which balance the little Mini Action much better than the over-long factory plastic option. The forend was slightly out of alignment, and the bedding surface wasn't to the same high standard as the Kroseg but it does come in a bit cheaper.

The differences specialize nicely. For a rifle more focused on longer range performance, say a full-length barrel 6mm ARC, the better bedding surface and finish with the Kroseg appeal - despite being 75 grams heavier. **For a close-range bush rifle like we have built, especially one used by youths or women, I would lean toward the Stalker with an RRP of \$1119.**

FLUTING

The next step was perhaps the most exciting, sending it over to Ian for barrel and bolt fluting. The barrel fluting was relatively easy. Relative to the bolt fluting that is. Ian applied the same six straight 5mm flutes that he offers for Tikka and Remington barrels. The bead blasted finish is always a nice touch, something that I've come to associate with all the custom guns that come from Greg and Ian.

This is the first instance of bolt fluting that we could find for a Mini Action, so Ian was completely on his own when it came to what the limitations might be. Fortunately it is a relatively straightforward one-piece bolt body. He had to map out all of the cuts to millimeter precision, avoiding all of the rather crucial elements, and to add to the mental gymnastics he made them spiral flutes! In the end he managed six flutes to tie in with the barrel and the finished product is simply stunning. It took Ian hours upon hours of mapping and toolmaking and I can only imagine how nerve-wracking the first cuts must have been!

Fluting such a short barrel and small action was never going to be a massive weight saving, but it does really finish off the custom look. Ultimately we saved 50 grams, not a whole lot in the grand scheme of the build but we're certainly at the cutting edge now.

All told we've shaved the weight of this rifle down to an incredible 2.19kg - 4lb 13oz in the old money. That's with the Stalker stock, suppressor, scope and magazine fitted – one very, very light little gun! Also remembering that in article one we began with a setup that weighed 7.4lb.

For anyone looking to do the same the bolt fluting is \$120 and the barrel fluting is \$250 excluding GST.

HUNTING

For a long time it's been in the back of my mind that this would make a great nanny tahr gun. Recently we've been encouraging people to take a suppressed, smaller calibre rifle in alongside their magnums to the tahr ballot blocks. We have to control nanny numbers in there (and record them on the app so that they count!!) but bombing up with big magnums is A) expensive and B) disturbs the area significantly. These little calibres are no match for a bull in any circumstances, but the nanny groups that often hang out in the lower scrub country are an easy target that we should be doing our best to control.

With this in mind I packed this rifle alongside the 28 Nosler for an east coast tahr hunt, the full details of which you'll read about in a future edition as Samantha finally found a bull she deemed worthy.

But as we worked the valleys as a party of four (Samantha and myself, and my brother Jake and his girlfriend Shayla) we usually had two of us stay on the riverbed and two of us climb higher to examine bulls once we'd found some. **So working with that system Jake carried one gun and I carried another, the 2.2kg of the Mini Action made this quite feasible.**

Nanny numbers were in good order almost everywhere we went, with all groups under five, perhaps unsurprising given the hours of control that had gone on in the area. What stuck out were two nannies who were actually trophies in our eyes. On the second day we encountered an ancient old girl with one juvenile hiding down low in the matagouri with her juvenile in tow. I could see through the spotter that she had an incredible amount of horn for a nanny, so was probably half as old as me. Firstly we had eyes for the bull in the bluff system above though, so while we investigated him we had to wind the nanny. **As it turns out he was just a young one so we should have shot her instead!**

It wasn't until the last day of the trip that we came across another. We had taken the hilux as far as we could from basecamp before daybreak, and were striding away along the flats of the main river valley trying to reach the mouth of a side valley before the sun hit us.

Only 500 metres from leaving the truck I looked

KROSEG PRECISION

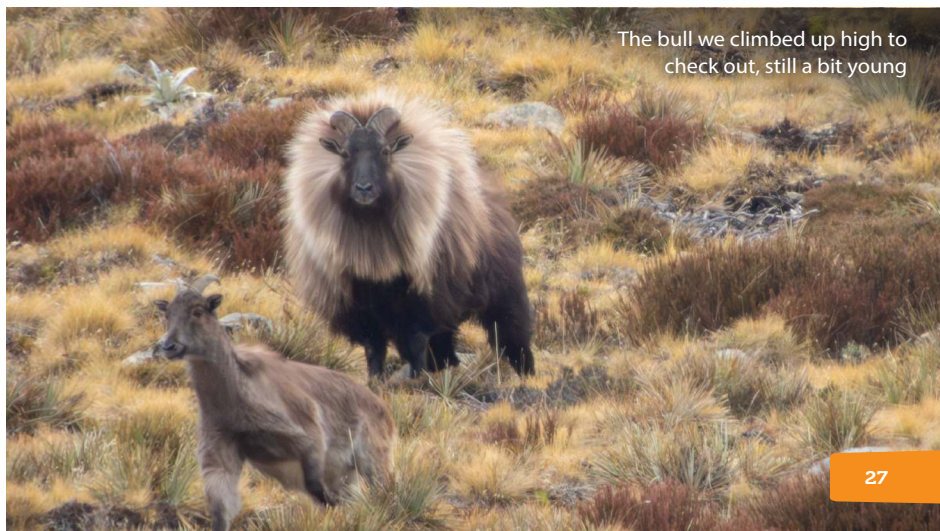


HOWA CARBON STALKER

Ian's incredible bolt-fluting work



Jake with the Mini-Action stowed very unobtrusively in the Hunters Element Arete pack



The bull we climbed up high to check out, still a bit young



Yet another animal I've shot with "Sam's" gun.... whoops



Another look at Ian's work out in the field

up, and just 60 yards away was a nanny tahr looking over her shoulder. I pulled my binoculars up and saw age rings absolutely stacked up from the bases. It was far too good an opportunity to pass up so I dropped to my knees and turned around to catch Jakes attention. **He saw me, and he and Shayla dropped down as well, removing the Mini Action from the pack.** I mimed shooting it, but he patiently waited for me to come over. That was a trophy nanny staring at us so I wasn't going to wait long!

Crawling along the frozen ground I hoped the old girl wasn't too sharp, and on arrival I quickly put a 100gr TTSX in the chamber and got settled over the pack. Unfortunately she was still resolutely facing the wrong way, with nothing but a back-end in view and a head looking back. It took some time, laying on iced over rocks and eventually she took a step to the right. I settled on the bone of her shoulder and squeezed one off.

In the frozen, sub-zero morning air the

shot was surprisingly loud, but the good news was she dropped on the spot without even a twitch. At the shot her juvenile sprang up so I swapped rifle for camera and tried to get in close. He didn't want to go too far, but there wasn't enough cover for me to get really close. Giving up I signaled the crew and Sam gathered two packs and a rifle and staggered over to me.

Upon examination it truly was a trophy nanny. 15 years old, and likely living on the flats to save what was left of her hooves. I was thrilled to take such an old animal! It was amazing she was still breeding with virtually no front teeth left but her molars were in surprisingly good order and her condition was just fine. The autopsy revealed that the TTSX had driven through both front shoulder bones and piled up under the skin on the far side, excellent performance and just what we wanted. Using a solid copper with the reduced velocities of the 14" barrel was a concern, but the theory proved right – hit bone and they'll do just fine.



A true trophy nanny - 15 years old by my count

We boned the nanny out (finally, no blowflies to worry about!) and carried on with our last day's hunting. We sure were successful but you're going to have to wait for the whole story ...

That's about it for the Bush Piglet build now, it's been a huge amount of fun building a very economical little gun that fills a number of roles.

It's delightful to carry in the bush, fits younger shooters very well and has next to no recoil - and the subsonic loads add a whole new dimension to my hunting.

Ultimately we'll swap to an internal magazine system rather than the plastic bottom metal and magazine used currently, Outdoor Sports have indicated they will be bringing in one of the options available in the United States. If this were a goat culling 223 I'd keep the magazine system so you can have multiple 10-shot magazines ready to go, but as a bush hunting rifle I prefer the smooth underside with an internal magazine. I have seen people trim the factory magazine to be only 3 shots and flush with the base, but the plastic bottoms that come from factory are a weak point with the Mini Action anyway. They can split around the action screws if over-tightened, and without a shroud or trimming the magazine release can be bumped accidentally. Swapping to an internal magazine and alloy bottom metal would fix any potential issues here.

Another big gain to be made will be with the scope. The current Zeiss is brilliant optically, but a lighter option would be more in keeping with the Bush Piglet theme.

So watch this space, after a year of hunting we'll do a check in to see what the Bush Piglet looks like then!



HowaTM

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LITTLE HELLFIRE

WRITTEN BY
KIM FAGAN

I was the newbie... the “tag-along”. I had no idea what to expect and came armed only with a camera to shoot

Destination: Rakiura (Stewart Island) – Little Hellfire. The morning had finally arrived. We boarded a small, single-engine Cessna A185 – enough room for just four of us – the pilot, Steve, Eric and I.

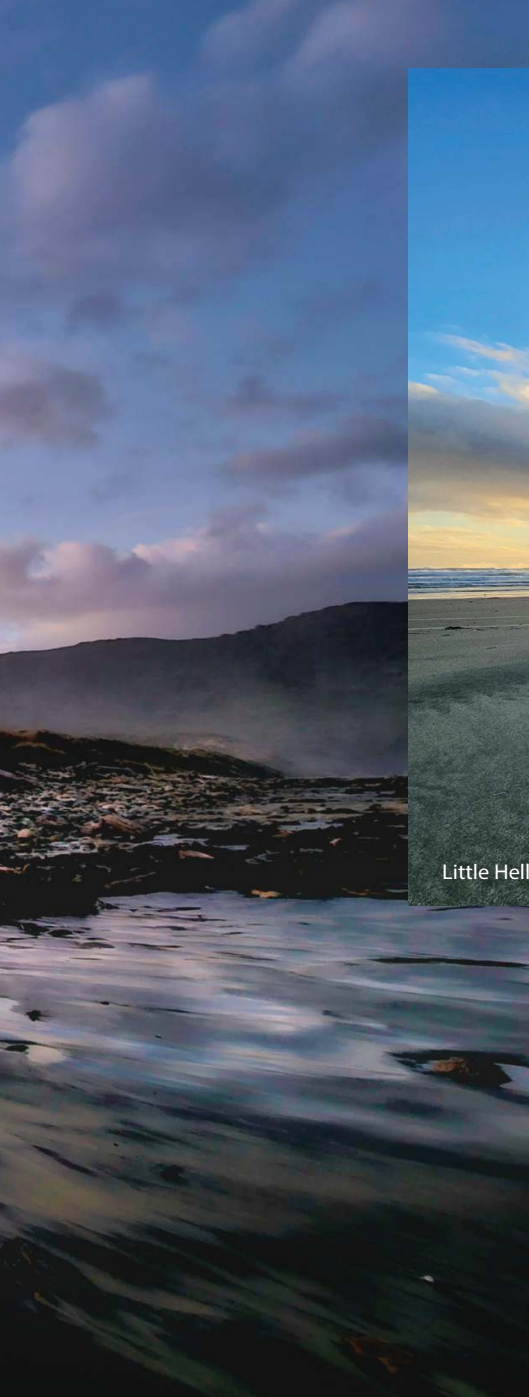
I couldn't help but be excited as I reminisced about childhood memories of flying in the old fertiliser planes as a toddler back on the farm (some 40 years prior). It was cool in Invercargill the morning we left, but clear skies gave us an awesome view of the small Southland city. Twenty minutes into our flight a slight drizzle left droplets of rain blurring our vision of the rough terrain below. **By the time we arrived at Little Hell Fire the rain had set in.** The pilot kindly helped us unload our gear onto the sandy landing strip, and within minutes, the

plane was gone again. We loaded our bags onto our backs like pack horses. It felt like we had enough supplies to last us a month! **The rain got heavier as we made a mad dash to the hut some 100 metres from our drop-off point.** By the time we made it, we were drenched (as was our gear). But we arrived to a warm hut with the fireplace blazing. A group of hikers had taken refuge the night before and had things all ready for our arrival. We weren't going to let a little rain dampen our spirits!

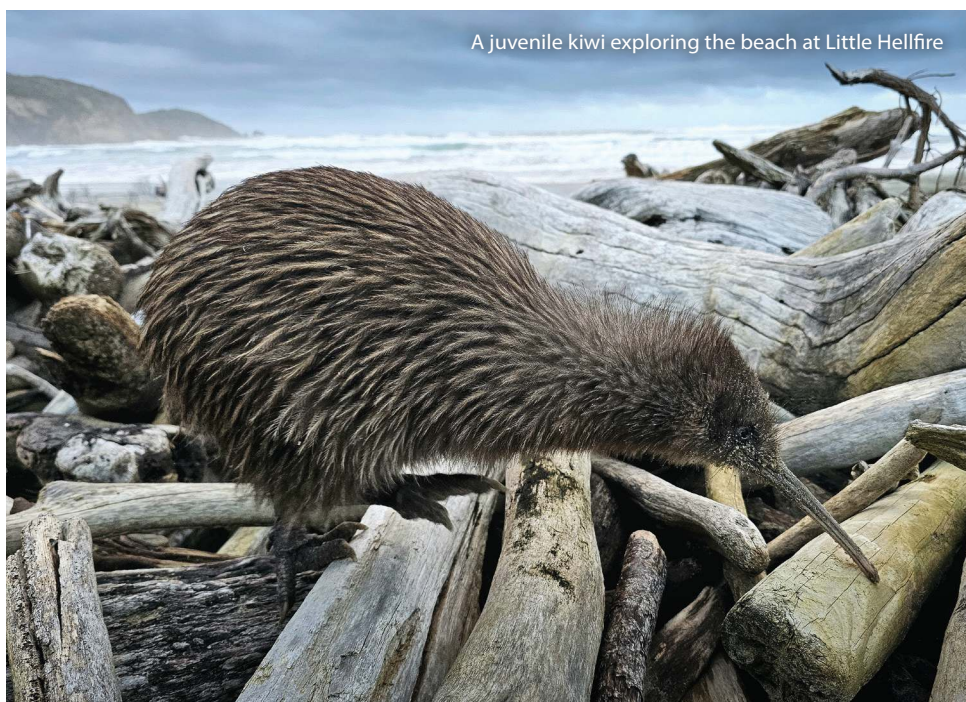
The hut was very cool. Six bunks placed

strategically around the southern walls, and a cosy Wagener fire ablaze in the corner. **The kitchen was supplied with pots, plates and other paraphernalia left behind by previous hunters.** We couldn't wait to get out to explore our playground outdoors... but the weather wouldn't have it. The rain continued, heavy at times, and we decided to wait it out. Tomorrow would be better, we decided. We sorted our supplies and bunkered down for the night. To our surprise – we all slept until 7am the following morning.

It was still dark as I peered through the far window to check the weather outside, my bones stiff from the broken and uncomfortable sleep. Hmmmm... overcast, but not raining! Yay... ...let's get out there! We pulled on our boots and headed outdoors. Granted, my perspectives are limited in this domain, but there was sign everywhere! Deer shit



Little Hellfire Airport



A juvenile kiwi exploring the beach at Little Hellfire

and sharp prints blanketed the sand dunes as we made our way up and over each rise. We eagerly followed a trail that led back onto the beach where our prey had clearly been grazing on fresh kelp the night before. As we walked, Eric and I chatted excitedly about the sign we'd seen and debated what type of animals we might encounter. As we casually neared the Southern end of the beach, I could see the start of the Mason Bay hut track that led up the hill. **Catching a glimpse of movement I turned to Eric to comment on more hikers making their way down the track before it dawned on me... that's not hikers... that's a deer!!!** I quickly ducked and whispered as quietly as possible in my excited state **"I saw one!"**. Eric mimicked my ducking movement, looked at me with a raised eyebrow and said **"really?"** I was adamant **"I did... I did see one!"**

Eric quietly snuck around to a viewing spot but looked at me confused and shrugged. I crept up beside him, giving a more accurate bearing on my sighting. As we both looked on, we saw a young spiker emerge on the hillside and casually stroll further down below the track. That was it – Eric was locked on. I stayed out of sight, petrified I would make a noise or be seen and spoil his opportunity. Eric headed up the gully – his focus entirely on the prize. I hung back on the beach, waiting for the "bang!". The minutes seemed to drag on, and there was no sound forthcoming. In the meantime, the rain was back, this time accompanied

by a cool southerly wind. Stupidly, I had left my jacket back at the hut and was worried about getting cold and wet. I huddled close to the sand dune cliffs in an effort to escape the weather. Still no sound. **Knowing Eric, I had visions of him spending the next three hours trekking further and further into bush, oblivious to any climate change.** I made the call to head back to the hut and get dry. I wandered slowly, in case the sound of a rifle blasting was still to come.....but nothing.

By the time I returned to the hut, the rain had penetrated my homespun jersey and



Day four kiwi encounter



Constant rain for ten days made for some muddy tracks



Eric's Whitetail spiker

seeped through to base layers. I was so grateful to be back in the refuge of our warm dwelling. I relayed our sighting to Steve and the hikers and we joked about Eric still being out in the rain. But as we exchanged small talk from the confines of the hut, we heard movement outside. **Sure enough, Eric had returned and, sure enough, a healthy young spiker adorned his back.** Looking very pleased with himself, I looked at him sheepishly and said **"It started raining"**. He replied simply, **"It's OK, I took my own photo"**. I was secretly gutted that I had missed my opportunity to witness the kill, but confident we'd seen enough sign that there'd be plenty of other opportunities. After all – it was only Day Two and we had another eight days of exploration to come.

Steve and Eric gutted and prepared the fresh meat ready for the safe. The

offal was kept aside to help attract unsuspecting cats and 'possums to the nearby DOC traps. Steve used a piece of fresh lung to set the cat trap for the night, and we retreated back to the hut for a cuppa. That night I could hear the rain pelting on the roof overhead. I remember lying there and thinking... that's ok – it can't rain the whole time we're here.

The next day we kitted up and headed our separate ways, determined to learn more about our surroundings. **Alas, we returned to the hut just before dark, slightly deflated, having discovered virtually nothing new and sporting another load of wet clothes.** But the fire was still going, and Steve had remembered coat hangers and pegs. We set about hanging up our wet gear to dry overnight.

We woke to more rain on Day Four but there were patches of dry spells, and

we didn't waste a minute getting out there amongst it. This was the day I spotted my first kiwi. I will never forget the adrenaline that pumped through my veins as I obsessed over this curious creature fossicking blindly among the tussock grass. **What a golden photo opportunity! I was absolutely blown away watching this rare bird so relaxed in its natural surroundings.**

I could have stayed and watched for hours, but Eric quickly grew bored. After all – it's just another kiwi... lol. I begrudgingly moved on with the search for the elusive Whitetail, "the grey ghosts of Rakiura" I'd been told. Little did I know at the time what that meant.

Every landscape we encountered presented raw beauty. Rolling sand dunes that stretched toward dense, wind-battered scrub. Fresh water streams bubbling over a vast array of colourful rocks. Coastal silhouettes of rocky fringes being beaten by a wild and angry sea. **The contrast in colours was amazing and as sunset approached, I was presented with further golden photo opportunities.**

That night back at the hut the cards broke out, and we eased into casual games of euchre. When I excused myself to attend the local ablutions, I spotted eyes glaring back at me from the cat trap. Steve was in luck (although I think I was more excited



Awaiting the return of the Cessna



Steve relaxing in the hut after a wet day hunting



Steve clearing a cat trap with DOC approval

than he was). One killer cat gone.

Day Five brought further rain, wind and rough seas. I stayed in to enjoy a good book, hot shower and get some washing dry. Again the hunters on dark returned wet and with relatively few sightings of the real deal. Our card games continued to grow in intensity as we filled in hut time. Steve proved exceptional at this crafty game, most times beating Eric and I, 3:1.

By Day Six I had had my third kiwi encounter. This time it was near the beach, almost in the same location where Eric had shot his spiker. The very same adrenalin rushed through my veins again. I couldn't believe my luck. Eric patiently waited while I oo'ed and ah'h'ed over this magnificent bird. As I watched on, my fury friend decided he'd worked up a thirst poking around the sandy dunes and, as if putting on a performance solely for my benefit, made his way down to the stream winding its way down from the hillside above. He stopped and took a number of deep gulps of fresh water, walking upstream as he went. When done playing in the water, he elegantly sprung mid-air onto the grassy verge opposite, and that was it... ..he was gone. My cup was full! What an amazing experience.

On Day Eight Eric and I climbed to the top of Mason's Bay. I felt an immense sense of pride as I reached the summit, even though my fitness level was not at its peak. It was truly amazing to climb a tree and gaze down at the vast coastline of the neighboring bay. But... still no deer!

On Day Nine Eric discovered a new game trail inland from the track. He was excited to find something new, but as luck would have it, we ran out of daylight to fully explore its potential.

All of a sudden it was Day Ten. We woke to a stunning morning. The sun was

shining and the wind had all but disappeared. It was time to pack up... ..you're kidding me! We had stacks of food left over and made mental notes of what to cut back on next time. I'd had such a great time - there was no doubt that there would definitely be a "next time". The plane wasn't arriving until 4.30pm so Eric made a quick dash back up the track to extend his findings from the day before. BINGO – two grey ghosts weaving their way in and out of sight across the grassy clearing. But we were out of time! Pressure was mounting to be back in time for the arrival of our winged chariot. It was a spectacular day to be leaving Little Hellfire, and perfect timing on the part of our trusty pilot who set departure for right on sunset. **Yet another golden photo opportunity.**

Back in Invercargill, we had a day to kill before heading home. Steve walked our legs off visiting the city's main attractions. Places of interest included:

E Hayes – a remarkable shopping experience featuring a unique display of over one hundred classic, vintage and modern motorcycles, automobiles, engines and other memorabilia.

Bill Richardson Transport World – the largest private automotive museum of its type in the world, showcasing more than 300 vehicles.

Fat Bastard Pies – the local pie shop where 12 patrons literally cued up outside waiting for their extraordinary pie fix.

St Mary's Basilica, First Presbyterian Church and other historic buildings – a number of impressive architectural buildings with an Italian Renaissance feel, beautifully restored throughout the city.

Southern Adventure Scout Shop –

the very last scout store in New Zealand boasting a vast collection of outdoor camping equipment.

Tuatara Lodge – clean and tidy backpackers' accommodation, centrally located in the heart of the city (at just \$40/night).

Speights Ale House – our local eatery just two doors down from the Lodge (highly recommended for quality meals and a great night out).

We also experienced fabulous service from the Cabi Company (tel 0211364960), who had taxied us and our gear all about during our stay.

As always, wherever you visit in the world, people make or break the experience. The hospitality we received from the people of Invercargill, Stuart Island Air and our comrades from Te Awamutu (Brian, Mike, Marco and Richard) was exceptional.

Thank you, Rakiura Hunters Camp Trust and Te Awamutu NZDA, for sharing a world-class expedition. We are truly blessed to live free in this country.





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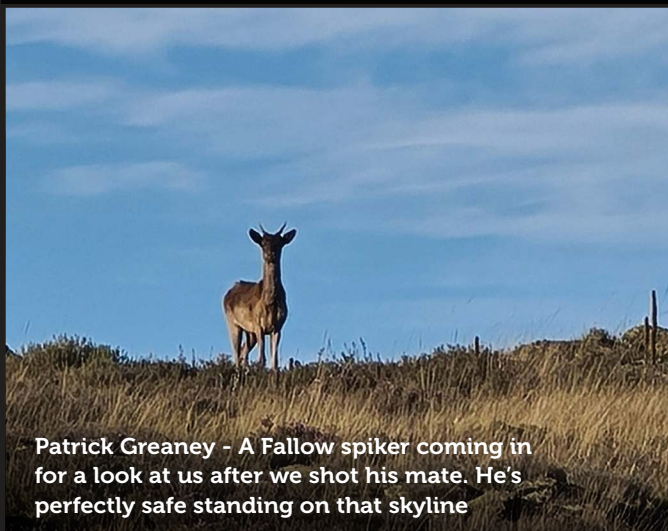
An incredible white bull tahr
captured by Bryn Thurlow



I had my 400mm lens on and the pig
was coming towards me so no time to
plan and compose, just kept pressing
the shutter - Greg Hill



Michael Ryan travelled the ditch to hunt in the
North Canterbury area during the roar and
came across the stag one morning



Patrick Greaney - A Fallow spiker coming in
for a look at us after we shot his mate. He's
perfectly safe standing on that skyline



Deer out late in the day by Joel Dustin

WINTER KIT FOR GETTING AFTER IT

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OUT THERE
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WRITTEN BY - CODY WELLER | ADVANCED ARCHERY MARLBOROUGH

THE ART OF ARROWS

Arrows have been around forever. The humble arrow has altered the path of humankind at times

Many battles were won due to the arrow, and the very existence of villages and tribes heavily depended on what is still known today as an arrow.

The arrow today is different to the arrows of the past. At the risk of starting to sound like an old timer, arrows nowadays look very different even to when I first started using them.

SHAFTS

My arrow setup in the beginning was an aluminium shaft that, at the time, was the ducks deluxe. Of course, being aluminium, they would bend and dent easily, and they could snap easily too. But that was nothing compared to the issues of wooden shafts that some even older timers would tell me about. Looking at arrows now and seeing what they have become is incredible. The basic design is still the same, but the materials are not.

Carbon fibre is now the pinnacle of arrow technology, and the components that go with these technical pieces of engineering are almost endless. Even a relatively basic carbon fibre arrow is exponentially better than what I started with 25-30 odd years ago. Carbon is

very straight and strong. Carbon arrows dominate the hunting and target world nowadays; as with every piece of hunting equipment, there are a lot of choices and theories to go with it.

INSERTS

The inserts alone have many options and weights (the glue-in piece of metal at the end of the arrow that your broadhead or field point screws into). Aluminium, titanium, stainless steel or brass. Gram weights of 22, 34, 50, 60, 75, or 95. The list goes on and on if you start to dive in deep. There's also a little thing called FOC. The entire FOC (Front Of Centre) is a big rabbit hole.

VANES

Then you start to look at the back of the arrow. Vane/fletch choices can be different lengths - the main ones are 2, 3 or 4 inches. The bigger the vane, the

more control they have over the arrow by creating drag. On the other hand, the bigger the vane, the more noise it can make as they erode at arrow velocity from the moment it has left the bow. Shorter vanes have less drag but, in turn, have less control over broadheads with a bigger surface area. Vanes like Blazer Vanes have a broader profile, so they can handle broadheads at only 2" long. However, they can create more noise than some of their 3" counterparts with less width.

Stiff material vs. soft material? Softer vanes usually adhere to the shaft more readily and can better handle target pass-throughs. But the soft material can flutter as it moves through the air. Stiffer vanes can take a little more prep to get to stick and may not bounce back quite as well from a target pass-through, but they are much quieter in-flight. Vane configuration is a big talking point for arrow enthusiasts. Three fletched or four fletched? Offset vs. helical vs. straight? Lastly, wrap or no wrap? Even the glue type is debated; some vanes must be primed before gluing.

NOCK

Moving right to the back, you'll find the nock. That's the little clip-like component that slips into the end of the arrow and clips onto the string in exactly the right place every time. Simple,



Nathan O'Hearn spends a lot of his time bowhunting Fallow from a tree stand or bush stalking them, so he's almost always having close-range shots on small deer. His custom arrow setup is 595gr

Different arrow lengths for a variety of draw lengths. You'll also see each has a slightly different diameter, there are pros and cons for each different diameter and it's about finding the right fit for your purpose.



By Hector McNeilly



For me, an arrow setup needs to be able to reach out to 80 yards. As when conditions allow, I am confident to take longer shots if needed



Comparing these 2" vanes with an X 3" vane, you can see the cut is quite different. Just another variation that is available

right? Not always. There can be bunch of different configurations that may dramatically change your point of impact if you're set up for a particular one. Oh, and there are lighted nocks too. These are great for shooting small game at night or hunting in thick bush as they make it easy to find your arrow again. However, they're not cheap. As you can see, the choice of the simple arrow can be a minefield.

WHICH ONE

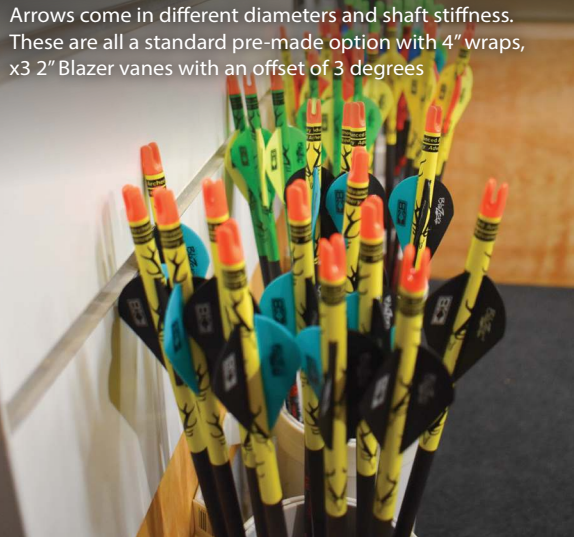
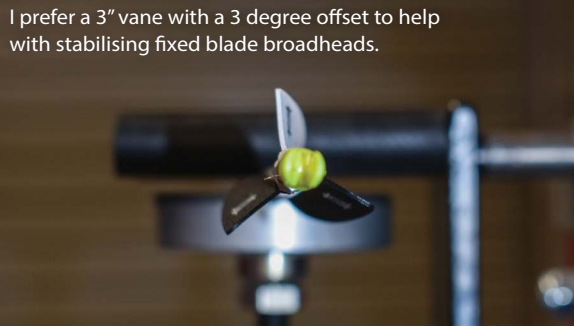
So with all these choices, you need to pick something that works for

you and your hunting application. In New Zealand, we don't really have much of what's considered 'dangerous game' - buffalo and so on. Aside from the odd mob of wild cattle and the occasional heavy-duty boar, most of our big game would be considered medium-sized. In saying that, I would say Sambar, a big bull tahr and some big Reds or Wapiti would lean towards light heavyweight. So, what is a good arrow for your average New Zealand bowhunting situation?

I like to try to get my arrow weight up into the 420 gram – 480 gram range. I can do this without doing anything too

crazy in regard to components, which helps make life easy when it comes to availability. My current setup is 480 gram which gets along at just over 274fps. Not the fastest arrow around but at that weight, it delivers 80 ft pounds and a lot of momentum.

So what does this all mean? My arrow with a fixed blade broadhead will carve through almost any critter we have here. Obviously, I could go heavier, but I would be forfeiting arrow velocity if I did that. When conditions and the right opportunity presents itself, I can make a good shot out to 80-odd yards. Too



I prefer a 3" vane with a 3 degree offset to help with stabilising fixed blade broadheads.

Arrows come in different diameters and shaft stiffness. These are all a standard pre-made option with 4" wraps, x3 2" Blazer vanes with an offset of 3 degrees

heavy of an arrow, and for a start, my scope housing wouldn't allow for enough drop at distance. Plus, a lot can happen between the release moment and the arrow's arrival. The slower they are, the more opportunity there is for movement.

At the other end of the scale, a super light arrow has a lot of velocity but far less momentum - you want the momentum to help carry the arrow through the animal. Then there is the issue that is called bone. Yes, in the ideal world, you shouldn't hit heavy bone. But, regardless of the velocity of your arrow, animals can and will still react to the sound of the arrow coming towards them.

To the naked eye, we think the animal just stood there, and the arrow arrived before it blinked an eye. However, slow-motion footage often reveals the animal beginning to react a few yards before the arrow arrives. In the time it takes for the arrow to cover those last yards, a big game animal can still start to prepare for departure. This normally means a lowering of the body and loading off the legs. In the nanosecond it takes for the animal to do this, bones that were not in the way are now in play. So, this is when light and fast becomes compromised. Super light arrows carry far less momentum.

Even if your arrow is doing 320fps, the speed of sound is still 1,125fps. So that sound still gets to the animal quicker than your very fast arrow. It's all tenths of

a second stuff, but sometimes animals can sneak in some movement. And often at 20 yards, that flinch factor isn't going to be great enough to worry about, regardless of weight. But at 40 yards, things are a little different. A fast arrow also creates more noise as it rips through the air vs. a heavier, slower arrow producing less sound. There are certainly good arguments for each arrow setup.

This is why my arrow is what I consider a mid-range weight. Heavy enough to deal with some bone and carry momentum but not so heavy that it will have the trajectory of a rainbow. It's fast enough to cover the metres quickly and quietly. And so it would seem, it's a case of finding the happy medium specific to you. Kind of like a foot in each camp.

It's about developing an arrow you have confidence in. For example, speed might benefit a bowhunter who hunts mostly Fallow deer. A bowhunter needs to consider many different factors to work out the best arrow for them. Draw length, poundage, maximum effective killing range, and broadhead type. These will all start to determine what your arrow setup will look like. A lot of accuracy and penetration can be gained with some playing around. **Don't be afraid to dabble in the art of arrows, or talk to your local expert about your options.**





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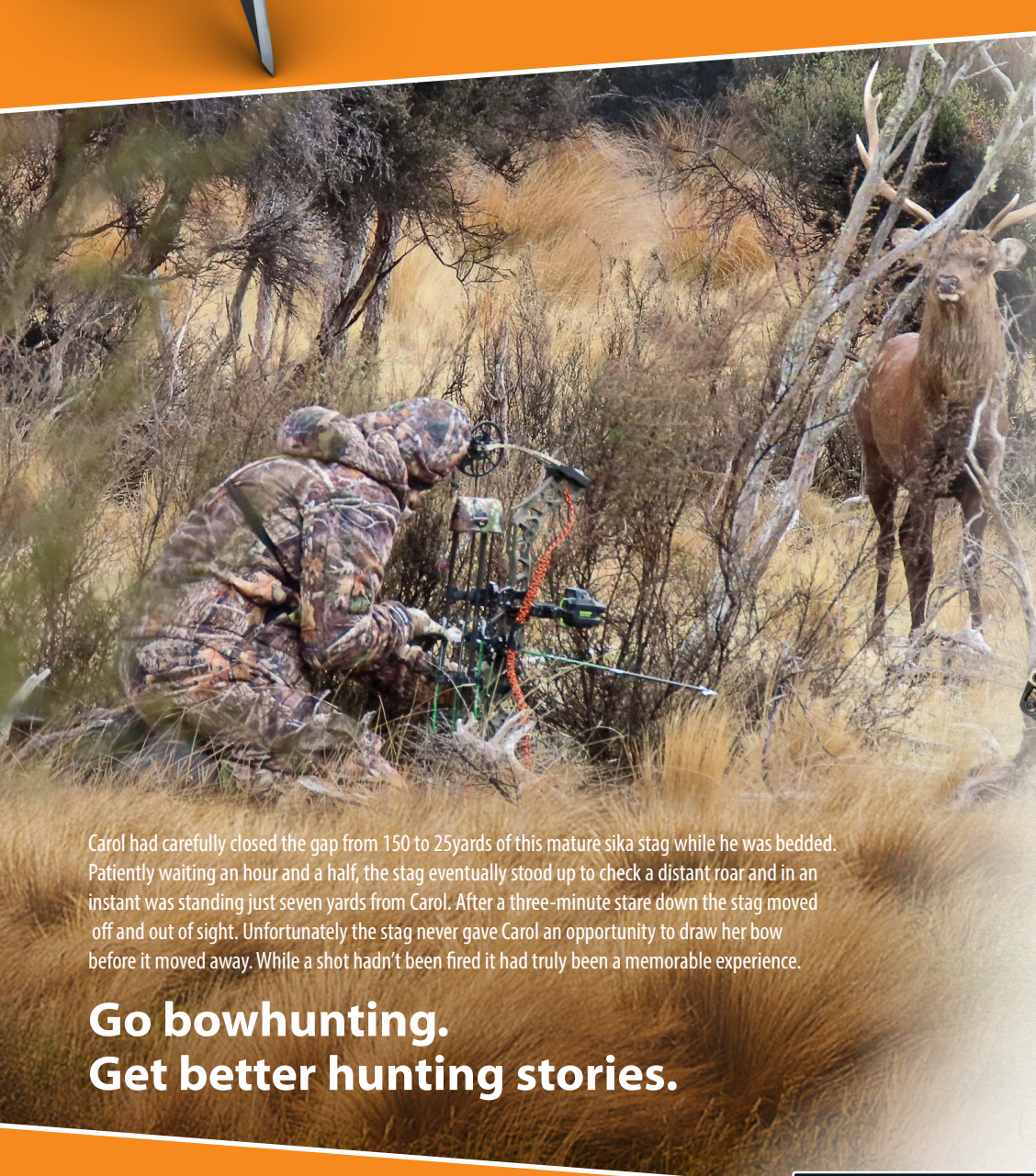
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hunting with a heffalump

WRITTEN BY ~ JAKE WOODWARD

With so many hunting areas to choose from in Central Otago, it's understandable if there's a block you haven't explored yet

It was a typical Sunday for us; a sleep in followed by a coffee and the usual morning chores. Being one of the few weekends we had 'free', we wondered what we could do to fill in the day.

"We could go for a drive up to that DOC block and have a look?" was my suggestion.

By 10am we had donned the Swannies, packed a day bag with essentials and loaded the dog in the back of the ute. Our mission was simple – make the short trip from our place to one of the local public land areas we'd yet to visit, park at the road end, and simply nosey our way along the ridgeline to recon the area for future visits. As my wife Melissa was seven months pregnant, we were simply thinking a brisk Sunday morning walk to fill in the morning was all we intended to do – so much so that I went out in jeans!

A short time later, we found ourselves parking at the road end, which sat right on the edge (and more importantly, at the top) of the conservation area. A check of the NZ Topo App confirmed that from the moment we started walking, anything we saw was fair game. As it was mid-May and approaching midday, and with the temperature

being fairly mild, we didn't expect to see much. Of course, I brought the rifle along in case a rogue goat or wallaby appeared. I also decided to pack a roaring horn just in case the odd Red was kicking around still roaring (and to get some practice in).

After walking for no more than thirty minutes along the track, we decided to sit down and scan the catchment below us, taking in what this new area had to offer. Like many places in Central Otago, the country was typical open tussock country with patches of matagouri and deep incised gullies. We had been glassing for no more than a few minutes when I heard Melissa – *"Oh look, a Fallow!"*

"Where?" I replied. *"Just on the other side of the valley, in the clearing".*

I finally laid eyes on what was a dark-coloured, and rather big-bodied Fallow – ***“It’s got a head on it!”*** I exclaimed.

And that was that – no more than thirty minutes walking into a new area, just down the road from our house, we were eyeing up what we figured was a decent Fallow buck on public land. A quick range using a cheap rangefinder I bought online told me that this deer was 1,000 yards away (I was surprised it got a reading). I checked the NZ Topo App once more and found that the buck was just inside the conservation block, but within moments of spotting him, he started to move towards us!

We watched as the buck made his way across the face from his original position. He was moving further into the catchment, which meant that we could be within shooting range in no time. As soon as the buck disappeared from sight, hidden by the intervening spur, we decided to push further along the ridge to an obvious rocky point to see if we could see him. Some 20 minutes later, we were sitting back down in amongst the tussocks trying to relocate the animal, which was now somewhere in this new catchment below us.

After some time trying to find him in what was a relatively open area, we found ourselves scratching our heads thinking, ***“where could he have gone?”***

Sure enough, it wasn’t long before I heard Melissa yet again – ***“Oh look, there’s the buck, and a doe.”***

I wasn’t at all surprised that Melissa had again found the deer first.

Just below us in the matagouri-clad creek were the two Fallow, feeding in an opening amongst the scrub – “good spotting”, I thought. I checked my watch to see that we’d just seen three deer all at around midday, an unusual sight for us since in our experience we had generally seen deer first thing or on last light – ***“Cool to see deer in the middle of the day”***, I whispered back.

A quick range revealed they were 500 yards away. We were pretty sure the buck we were looking at was the one we saw only half an hour earlier, so thought we would gently make our way down the hill and get a closer look.

Up to this point, we’d managed to stick to the plan of an “easy walk” along the ridgeline without any change in elevation. Tempted to get a good look at this buck, we made our way down the hill, periodically losing sight of the deer as we moved through the dips and gullies of the hillside. As we



Melissa glassing (and Hunter posing) over some new country – an exciting time when exploring a new spot



Typical Central Otago country – lots of matagouri!



Trying hard to spot any animals in amongst the thick stuff



Some nice open areas to explore – but watch out for speargrass



Recovering the deer from his last resting place – useful to have a dog in these situations



Admiring the spread on the buck



Melissa doing all the glassing

for a fourth time - ***"There's two deer just there"***, as she pointed just to my left. ***"For Pete's sake"***, I thought as I looked over, and sure enough, two black Fallow spikers were just feeding only 300 yards away. We were well exposed by this point, so decided to sit tight and just watched the two young Fallow feed their way out of sight, while we tried to relocate one of the two bucks beneath us.

We must have sat about for another thirty minutes waiting for the spikers to feed out of view before we decided it was safe to cover a little bit more ground.

We were targeting a little 'bench' consisting of rocks just beneath us which we felt would be a good place to set up the rifle and wait for one of the bucks to reappear. The entire time I could hear the sound of our dog Hunter winding and snorting as she sucked in the scent of what was obviously deer below us.

We made it to the bench, set the rifle up and had a quick snack. No deer to be seen at this point with only the dog winding and carrying on. ***"Let's just sit here for half an hour or so and see if anything shows itself"***. We could only assume

that the bucks and their does were just out of view amongst the creek scrub.

Thirty minutes passed and all the deer we had seen were now nowhere to be seen. By this time, my watch was reading 2pm. With a freezer half full of sausages, we weren't too concerned about taking a deer on this

trip as we were satisfied we had enough to get us through the winter and into summer. With that thought, ***"Should I let out a 'Croak'?"***, my question directed to Melissa – "Might as well make a noise and see if anything shows itself". We agreed, and so using my roaring horn, I let out what could only be described as an unfit old man struggling to pass his stool. Unsurprisingly, after sitting for another thirty minutes, no deer were to be seen.

Being somewhat satisfied with seeing that many animals, we decided that our "morning walk" was now over, and it was time to head back into town and do the normal Sunday afternoon activities – grocery shopping.

We decided to sidle along at the same elevation instead of walking straight back up the hill to the ridge.

Our aim was to get a different angle on the deer we've just seen. This would have involved crossing back over the small spur back into the first catchment we were in and then back up towards the truck. As we made our way across, the wind changed slightly and was blowing 'across' the face we were on, which meant we were walking into a horizontal wind. This immediately sparked Hunter back

made our way down, we stopped to rest (we'd only been travelling for a few minutes, but I had a heffalump in tow). We sat down to check that the animals were still in sight and I heard Melissa for a third time – ***"look, there's three deer on the scree slope"***, as she pointed to an area not far from where we saw the original pair. **They didn't stick around long, though as they were moving from the scree slope down into the bottom of the creek and out of sight beneath us** – the short glimpse I got of them confirmed what looked like two does with black coats and an almost ginger-looking buck. We figured they would be the ones we could try and target.

At around the same time, I heard Melissa

into life as she lifted her nose and started displaying all the traits of a dog on deer – ***“there’s something just over the ridge”***, I thought. My immediate thinking was it would be the two spikers we saw earlier – they had fed their way into this catchment.

I slowly crested the brow of the spur, and the minute my head popped over, I was greeted by a dark, decent-bodied Fallow buck feeding on the flats, just beneath the spur we were about to cross. I immediately dropped to my knee and motioned for Melissa to come to me to grab the rifle. She gracefully made her way over and took the rifle from my hands, and immediately spotted the Fallow – managing to position herself just off the edge of the ridge so as not to appear obvious in the event the buck looked in our direction. **With Melissa set up prone behind the gun, squishing our 7-month-old soon-to-arrive-son, she waited for me to confirm the range – “250 yards”**, I whispered. Melissa made a quick adjustment on the scope before resting behind the rifle once more.

I replaced the rangefinder with my binos as I observed a very fit and healthy-looking Fallow buck with a dark coat and decent length to his antlers. His antlers were accessorised with bits of grass and hemlock. Standing broadside and literally staring into the distance by this point, I heard the unmistakable suppressed “thump” of the trusty Tikka .308 just to my right and saw, as in slow motion, the body of the buck ripple from the shoulders back to its rump as a result of a solid hit to the shoulders – ***“Shot!”*** I yelled to Melissa – ***“You got him!”***. As I confirmed the hit, the two spikers we had seen earlier skipped their way from beneath us and over into the next catchment.

Hoping the buck would drop right there on the spot, I watched through the binos as he scurried a few metres and disappeared behind a thick patch of scrub. After Melissa reloaded, we waited for approximately ten minutes, in case another shot was necessary. With no sign of the deer, we decided that Melissa and Hunter would make their way down with the rifle while I sat and directed them to where I had seen the animal drop. No direction was needed as I saw Hunter take Melissa right in on to the buck’s last known location. To my surprise, the deer reappeared by standing up – ***“Hmph, I recall Fallow are hearty animals”***. Moments later, another shot rang out before the deer once again disappeared. He was down.

I made my own way down to greet the others before all three of us cautiously made our way to the patch of scrub



Melissa with her buck – despite being 7 months pregnant, no excuses not to get out there hunting

where the deer went down. After being sure he was down, we allowed Hunter to go in and finish her job – Melissa and I praised Hunter, ***“Good girl!”***

We were delighted to see we have secured a healthy buck – not the biggest set of antlers in the catchment compared with what we had seen earlier in the day, but one that we thought was a good decision to take from the group, in terms of the quality of the tops.

It was now mid-afternoon, and we (or rather me), got to work boning the entire deer out save for the shoulder that took the brunt of the 150 grain projectile. With all that meat, we figured we would have just enough space in the freezer for mince. Saving money on groceries will be important as we will have nappies to buy in a few months!

The trek back to the truck was uneventful but uphill. I carried the head and the pack of meat back to the truck while Melissa carried the rifle and a pregnant belly. Arriving back at the truck after 5pm and exhausted from the climb, we smiled and thought, “what an unexpected ‘recon’ mission that was”.

With a freezer full to the brim with enough meat for the next 12 months and a new block explored, we’re ready to tackle our biggest challenge yet – a child.



Letting the meat cool – a handy trick from watching countless NZ Hunter episodes



The final few hundred metres to the truck





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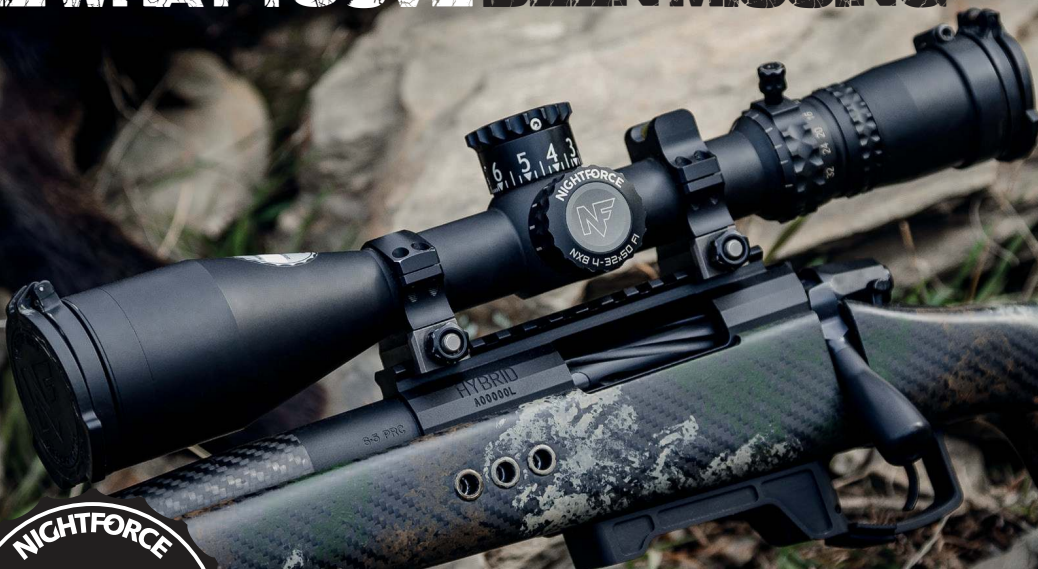
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The Perks of Making Mistakes

WRITTEN BY
MITCH THORN
@SOUTHISLANDRIFLEWALKERS

There it is, that trophy you've spent years searching for. It's in your crosshairs, you've got a good rest, the wind is on your side, and it's at a comfortable range. All that's left is to squeeze off the shot, and all your hard work has paid off

But the shot missed, the animal has gone, and you're left thinking, what if. Did you forget to sight your rifle in? Get the range wrong? Was the scope level? Did the excitement of the situation get the better of you?

You might not even get to the shooting part of the hunt. Did you spook the animal? Get the wind wrong? Forget the bolt?

On some trips you might not even get the chance at a stalk. Did you hunt the right area? Research the access? Were you fit enough to reach the hunting country?

Even if you do make enough of the right decisions to shoot an animal, there's still room for things to go wrong after the fact. You might not correctly look after the meat in the field, and let the flies get to it, or leave it too long and risk bone taint. There are numerous factors to hinder your success during a hunting trip, including issues that may arise before, during, and after the hunt. Everyone's prone to making mistakes - hell, I've made every one of the mistakes that I just listed. I wish I hadn't, but those mistakes have taught me lessons and helped me become a more successful hunter.

Through eight years of public land backpack hunting, I've got a lot wrong and a few things right. Some mistakes we make time and time again, while others have such an effect on us, we wouldn't dare repeat them. Often our mistakes have minor repercussions, but some mistakes can put the safety of you and your mates in serious jeopardy. In this two-part series, I'm going to share a few of the learnings I've had from situations I hope to avoid in the future. Hopefully, you can have a laugh at my expense, and I might be able to save you from learning some of those same lessons the hard way.

Occasionally, there may be several issues that arise during a journey. The story I'm about to share was from an entire trip that went wrong and where bad decisions were made well before it even started. My mate and I were planning a weekend trip up a West Coast creek with the aim of reaching the tops out the back. The route looked unassuming on the topo map; we expected the walk into the first biv to

take about three hours. To make the most of our available time, we left after work on Friday, so we were in the thick of it by Saturday morning. It was late summer, which meant we had plenty of daylight hours up our sleeves. The first warning sign that we ignored appeared in the form of a brown flooded river at the trailhead. The track followed the true left of the main flow before heading up a side creek but we disregarded the flooded river, knowing we didn't have to cross it. At 6pm with a light drizzle falling, we left the car park.

Ninety minutes later we reached the side creek branching off the main river. The track had been relatively easy to follow until this point, but what we didn't know was that the cut track finished there; the rest of the route followed the creek. The 'creek' was absolutely pumping with brown water crashing down the boulder-filled streambed. Additionally, we were losing light so we had to get out the head torches. By this point, the drizzle had turned into rain and over the next few hours that rain turned into a proper West Coast downpour.



Rather than admit defeat and turn around we set off up the creek, forced to follow the true left until we could find a place to cross. The stream sounded like a jet engine, between the noise of waterfalls crashing down and the torrential rain falling around us, we could hardly hear ourselves think, let alone each other's voices. With nowhere to cross the stream, we were forced to climb and sidle around gorges and waterfalls with no idea if we were heading to greener pastures. **We were constantly checking our GPS in the hopes the biv would be around the next bend.** A few hours into it, we found ourselves a little over halfway up the stream. It felt too late to bite the bullet and back out; we told ourselves we were in too deep, and it would be easier to reach the biv than return to the car park.

We took turns leading the charge and giving the person at the back a chance to rest from making the big decisions. It's amazing how mentally exhausting it can be to be at the forefront of this kind of situation. With no idea where you're going or what's in front of you, every small decision feels more important than usual. We found a good flat bench above the creek, the perfect spot to set up a tent or a fly. It's a shame I said we wouldn't need it and left it in the truck. At about midnight, we took a breather and turned off our head torches, conscious of the fact that they don't last forever. The highlight of the trip gradually appeared around us; glowworms surrounded us. Even in the darkest and dampest of nights, the West Coast still finds a way to show its beauty. **Despite only sitting down for five minutes, the continuous downpour left us completely soaked and shivering.** We had to leave our little safe place and get back to the challenge at hand, as the biv wasn't getting any closer by sitting around. We eventually dropped back down to the creek and found a spot to cross upstream of a mob of goats sheltering in a small cave. We reached it at 2am: soaked, cold, beaten, absolutely knackered, slightly scared and extremely

relieved. Our three-hour hike had quickly spiraled out of control, ending in an eight-hour battle to reach the shelter of a dry biv.

We slept in on Saturday morning and set off early in the afternoon to attempt to carry on up the valley to the biv on the tops. The rain had stopped falling at some stage during the night, but we faced the same issue with the flooded creek and worried about daylight hours. We finally made a good decision and returned to the biv for a relaxing evening. The walk out on Sunday showed how simple the route could have been if given the respect it deserved. We followed the creek out and made it to the truck in three and a half hours, stopping to knock over a few goats along the way. Without the flooded creek and the restricted view from the beam of our head torch, it all seemed so simple.

SO, WHAT DID WE LEARN FROM THE TRIP?

Firstly, we completely underestimated the route.

The West Coast is infamous for its wild weather and difficult travel - something we disregarded in the lead-up to the trip. Coming across a river that was flooded should have been a clear warning sign.. We knew we didn't have to cross it but it's a pretty safe bet that if the river is flooded, the tributaries will be as well. A small wee creek on the topo map may look like nothing to worry about, but there's a good chance it's much bigger than you're expecting. On top of that, we didn't allow ourselves enough daylight to hike in. I don't mind hiking at night; it's a great way to squeeze the most out of time-restricted expeditions into the hills. However, I have become much more cautious about setting off with just my head torch since that experience. It's important to consider the appropriate time and place for doing so. If an area is well tracked or you've been there before it becomes a lot less complicated. That

Chris with a billy shot on that West Coast river



Carrying a fly is a good idea, we were lucky we had one when some kea ripped up our tent



Good quality head torches should be seen as safety essentials in my eyes



Tenacious tape and tent patches are handy to have





We thought this campsite would be sheltered but the hillside acted as a funnel



Hunkered down on the tops, the rockwall and guideropes saved us

being said, even a well-defined track is pretty easy to lose when only under the guidance of a headtorch. However, on that note, our head torches really saved our butts on this trip. A good head torch is worth all the money you can throw at it in these situations. We both had Ledlensers and have sworn by them ever since - do yourself a favour and splash out.

SHELTER

I will take full ownership of our next mistake - leaving your tent or fly at the truck 'because you won't need it' is the wrong call every time. If we had the tent, we could've hunkered down when we realised our dire situation and tackled it in the light of day with fresh legs and a fresh perspective. The chances of us injuring ourselves grew throughout the night as the mental and physical fatigue

set in. I've never set off on a trip without some form of shelter since, as you never know what might happen.

WHEN TO TURN BACK

Knowing when to turn around is also a skill often learned the hard way. In hindsight, we should've turned around when we reached the raging torrent of a creek; or even earlier when we reached the car park and saw the flooded river. There's no shame in backing out; in my opinion, it shows more guts to admit defeat than put yourself in a stupid situation fueled by the desire to explore or, worse, for your own ego.

QUALITY GEAR

Good gear is worth its weight in gold. That \$20 warehouse head torch isn't going to help you navigate in the dark. The \$200 you saved on a cheaper

rain jacket isn't going to be worth anything when you're freezing your arse off in a classic West Coast deluge. If it wasn't for our rain gear, we could have easily become hypothermic. We were lucky that it was summer, and if that trip had been six months later, I doubt a good rain jacket would've made much of a difference.

WEATHER

Being familiar with the weather forecast as you head in is a no-brainer. On this trip, we knew the weather was supposed to clear, but it was something we focused on a little too much. If we had looked more carefully at Friday night's forecast, we would've held off going until Saturday. We've learned to pay close attention to weather in the lead-up to a trip. Maybe the river will be flooded, or a foot of snow has freshly fallen. I may sound like a broken record but the weather in the mountains is changeable, so you need to be prepared for any situation. Even the most reliable weather forecasts can be wrong. I don't recall seeing that much rain forecast for that Friday night, but boy, did it rain.

RESEARCH

Looking back, it would have been helpful to do better research on the route before we started our trip. There is a wealth of knowledge and experiences shared online about just about every hut we have here in New Zealand. If you Google the hut or track you want to explore, the odds are there will be some form of route guide written up online. 'Remote Huts' is an excellent resource with detailed routes to a lot of the harder-to-reach spots. The DOC website is also helpful. Tramping and hunting groups on social media will often have posts of previous trips or people willing to share need-to-know information about accessing areas, if you ask them. There are a few great books scattered around from serious adventurers; for example, Moir's guide (North and South) gives a comprehensive list of routes ranging from Ohau to the South Coast.

We got a lot wrong on that trip but, three years on, it's still one of my most memorable ones. It's helped shape a lot of my hunts ever since; made me think a lot more about the reality of what can go wrong and of the importance of comprehensive planning. It was full of harsh lessons that needed to be learnt. I am grateful that the challenging situation occurred on a summer evening and that I was with a friend who remained calm throughout the experience. Having good

mates that you can trust in the hills is another important step to a safe and successful trip. Realising that I can rely on those around me to make sound choices in challenging circumstances has expanded the scope of my potential trips. In my eyes, panic ensues panic, and if someone loses their head it's easy for that doubt to spread. Think toilet paper during the covid lockdown...

CAMPSITE

A few years ago, Chris and I were on a multi-day tops trip traversing some incredible country. We would move camp each day to open up new areas to hunt. On the third night, we found a nice flat spot amongst undulating hilly peaks to set up camp. We dropped down to a head basin a few kilometres away to hunt the evening away in the hopes of finding a good stag. As the night drew closer, a low bank of clag rolled up the valley and blanketed the hillside. Our visibility dropped from miles to metres in minutes. Not worried, we headed back to camp for an early night. Now which peak was it under? So began the hour-long journey of grid-searching the dark and claggy hillside. A head torch doesn't work all that well in thick clag; the brighter you set it the more it reflects back at you. We often looked down a slope thinking it was the valley wall before heading down it and finding out it was a small descent to another terrace. Eventually, we found the rocky outcrop we had pitched our tent beside. I've always marked my camps on a GPS since that night. If it wasn't for the rocks, we likely would've sidled beneath our camp and carried on stumbling around like a couple of lost idiots.

There's a lot to learn when picking a good campsite. We've had our fair share of stormy nights in the hills, but up until very recently, we hadn't had any major issues. A flat spot with a bit of shelter from the approaching winds is ideal. Tucking into any nearby patches of bush helps in buffering out the wind, and the same goes with setting up behind rocky outcrops or amongst undulating hills or mounds. Avoid camping on saddles; we've made that mistake a fair few times. On our last hunt in Fiordland, we had a dream run of weather for the first few days. We camped our way along an exposed ridge, confident our forecast would hold true. On the fifth day the weather was forecast to pack it in. We rolled the dice and decided to try and camp through it rather than lose our elevation and have to climb back the following day. We couldn't have picked a more exposed spot, and as the wind picked up, we had to hold the walls of the

Battling in Fiordland. We ended up digging channels around the edges of the fly



tent through each gust. In one particularly strong gust of wind, the tent collapsed and flattened on top of us, leaving us trapped underneath. One of the poles snapped, leaving an exposed sharp edge ready to rip the outer fly at any second. There was about 20mm of rain forecast for that night, so we knew we had to do our best to avoid extra damage. We wrapped a towel around the broken section of the pole and, between gusts, managed to pack the tent away from the inside out. Thankfully the tent came with a splint. Once we dropped down to the bush, we managed to repair the pole and save a functioning tent for the rest of the trip. Our other tent had been ripped up by kea the previous day!

On one trip Raddy and I made a dicey decision to hold our elevation and camp through a storm rather than drop down to a nearby hut. The weather hit as we were halfway through setting up the tent. A gust of wind ripped through and pulled the pegs out of the ground, and if it wasn't for Raddy's quick reflexes, our tent would have been as good as gone. We built a solid two-foot rock wall around the tent and tied ten guy ropes to keep us in place. We woke up to bent poles and a few rips in the fly, but it was better than the alternative! If you can make a rock stack on top of your pegs, it will help pin you down; paired with a good rock wall you can limit the effect of the wind. That morning, after a cold night, we stumbled across a nice chamois buck basking in the morning sun. Raddy made sure of the job with a

Kea damage - not much you can do to avoid this other than pack down your tent each day



well-placed shot through the shoulder. It was a gamble camping up high, but with the right gear and knowledge on how to hunker down, it paid off. We definitely put a lot more thought and effort into this campsite than into our recent disaster in Fiordland!

Another thing to consider is how much rain is forecast. If you've found a nice flat campsite, you could wake up in a bog, or even a pond if you're in Fiordland. Think about where water might pool and how it can drain away. We've had to dig a few channels around our tents in Fiordland before, but it's an easy fix to stop your tent getting wet feet. Ensuring your gear is still in good nick before heading out is another essential part of preparing for a trip. It's something Chris and I didn't do before a Fiordland Wapiti hunt. We got flown into a block with ten days' worth of kit, dropped half of it on the valley floor and took the other half up to the tops. We had a bit of weather forecast to come through, so set up a solid base camp. Unfortunately, our tent was a few years old and decided it was the right time to start leaking. Roll on six days of rain in a drippy tent...

Read on to Part Two next issue, where I'll share a few nightmares I've had behind the trigger and another shambles of a trip full of learning experiences.





THE ULTIMATE HUNTING BIPOD

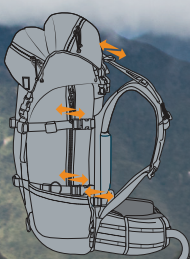
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The background of the page is a photograph of a vast, arid landscape. In the foreground, there are dark, rocky hills covered with small, low-lying shrubs. Beyond this, a series of rolling hills are visible, their slopes bathed in the warm, golden light of the setting or rising sun. A layer of low-lying clouds or mist fills the valleys between the hills, creating a sense of depth and atmosphere. In the upper right portion of the sky, a full moon is visible as a bright, circular disc. The sky itself is a clear, deep blue, transitioning from a lighter hue near the horizon to a darker blue at the top.

IT DON'T ALWAYS GO TO PLAN

WRITTEN BY
LUKE CARE



A century-old highcountry hut, proven shelter from the storm

Some stories need to simmer a while. You need the time to pluck up the nerve to admit what a shocker you had. Our 2021 'boar tour' was one

Pigs for Africa, a 150lber behind every matagouri bush, the Promised Land awaits! We were all buzzing on the journey south.

Two utes, four blokes and about twelve dogs. Craig Simpson ("Seals" to everyone but his mother), Dad (Terry), Amien Dewar and me, stormed down from the North Island in a cloud of diesel smoke and dog fur, heading all the way to South Canterbury in the first stint. Our first stop was a beautiful highcountry station in the McKenzie country with a pig problem. It sounded like my kind of 'problem'! We began exploring that very evening, but despite not seeing much sign we returned to the cozy hut with high spirits from running the dogs in such open country with views back to the main divide only a few kilometres away. **A huge feed and some beverages finished off a lovely day watching the ice form on the window of a century old backcountry musterers hut.** Not only that but the promise of hunting in the morning – bliss.

The next morning we charged off in the Polaris, excitedly glassing smooth tussock gullies and rocky gorges for fresh sign. We found great Red stags and even chamois (which sure confused our North Island dogs!) but no pig sign fresh enough to be useful. Our spirits took more of a battering after four days of covering nearly every valley in the 12,000 hectare (30,000 acre) property and not catching a single pig – things weren't looking good for the North Island pig hunters, but the landowner was clearly happy! The hard thing was that we weren't even beaten, we just couldn't find a pig to start with!

With several days to look forward to and some

bad weather imminent we decided to bolt for our next port of call in Central Otago. The snow began in Alexandra and by the time we entered the Maniototo it was positively polar. Eventually locating Liam Squire's house in the whiteout we shot indoors before father frost could wrap us up.

Waking in the morning the whole landscape was entirely buried in snow, demolishing any plans we had of hunting Liam's highcountry tussock blocks – our imaginations ran wild with what we were missing out on. **Giant tussock basins just teeming with pigs, bail ups in the snow and 100lbbers were basically piglets.**

We hunted a local farm and got some small pigs but it was just fringe country, not the big expanses we'd travelled down here to hunt. Watching the dogs experience deep snow for the first time made for some good comic relief though. Rolling in it, snapping mouthfuls and throwing it in the air, and picking up their feet and looking at them with a puzzled expression - wondering why they were so cold! Despite the novelty it quickly became apparent that the significant snow meant there was a lot of work to do and we were just in the way, so back north we went. Hyperbole aside I was quite disappointed, the Maniototo was famed pig hunting country I'd read about in magazines since I was knee high and I was gutted not to get a chance to run the dogs around the rocky tors.



Seals cooking a feast





Snow in Central Otago made life difficult



Watching our North Island dogs play in the snow was good fun



We made some phone calls and managed to tee up a notable block in North Canterbury, we couldn't believe our luck.

Of course it was absolutely packed full of pigs! Huge blue boars, every gully hiding a monster, they came off this property by the dozen. We were rubbing our hands together in anticipation as we checked in at a Top Ten that night after about ten hours of driving to find roads that were open. Doing some forward thinking I called a mate from the area and asked for some directions on this particular station. His first words were *"how did you get on there you jammy bastard"* followed by *"Hang on, I'm sure some of my mates are up there this weekend... I'll see if they can help you out"*.

I got off the phone with the distinct feeling that the local war drums were beating and sure enough, 30 minutes later the owner called to say *"sorry mate, I doubled booked!"* Despite my pleas for impoverished North Island pig hunters who wouldn't be a threat to a grandmother running a pack of poodles we were still not allowed on. Well, shit! Lesson learned, fly under the radar young man. What to do now? We were something like 8 days and 3000km in for a couple of piglets ... it wasn't looking good.

We spent hours on the phone wracking our brains for who could help us salvage

the final days of the trip. All kinds of charitable 'mates' turned us down when we actually did try to take them up on the offers of hunting with them. Finally we made a new connection, a station in the upper reaches of the Awatere. Hard yakka and a fair few K's between pigs but we were welcome to come and have a look around – that was us!

At this stage we'd had to return our borrowed side by side so it was just shanks pony, and the drive up the Awatere soon reminded us that those shanks would be feeling it by the time we were done.

Meeting Craig and Christina, the farm staff, we were soon made to feel right at home. The hospitality was next level from the farm owner and we had a great night in the most salubrious shearer's quarters I've ever seen. The next morning they took time away from operations to come and show us around, pulling out a pair of side by sides to start tiki touring around just a corner of the vast property.

It was certainly an eye opener. Fairly brutal country with thousands of little gullies chock full of sweet briar and bare rock, it was home to a lot of goats, the odd pig and some fantastic Red deer. I couldn't help feeling though that this was a place to find a good pig one day,

with so much country and so few people boars could get a bit of age – and they'd be well fed after the goat culls! We had a good look around but again, only found little pigs. A highlight was getting my first good look at a chukar though, a striking bird and something any gamebird hunter would be proud to tick off the list.

The next morning, our last opportunity for the trip before we had to catch our ferry, we went down the main river faces without our guides.

The Awatere does a series of wild loops here as it struggles with the tilted volcanic geology. We saw a few deer, some old pig sign and the ever-present goats but nothing too exciting. Oh well, after a week of bummer all our expectations were pretty low anyway!

That being said the dogs worked well. After so long with very few pigs under their belt I wouldn't have been surprised if the young ones started acting up and looking sideways at a goat or two, but they diligently kept their noses down looking for that tantalizing scent.

Mid-morning we reached a side gully that was lined in impassable bluffs on the far side. In the base of it there was some older sign so Amien and I 'walked'



Kohi feeling the miles after a week of hunting

(stumbled) the dogs down, but there wasn't a lot of interest. We decided to head up the gully in the hopes the pig had wandered that way, leaving Dad and Seals to have a breather in the sun.

Halfway up we could see the dogs accelerating on the GPS, they went right up to the terrace and were heading away at a fairly decent clip.

Amien and I upped the pace as much as we could, but as we crested the terrace the dogs were coming back. We looked at each other in confusion, the dogs had been very keen and the U turn seemed a bit sudden.

However, instead of coming back to us the dogs steamed right on by and back into the gully we had just come up, in full view of us the whole time until they went over the lip. **If our eyebrows could have gone any higher they would have as the sounds of a tussle erupted just below us on the steep rocky faces.** Cleverly the dogs had realised they'd backtracked some scent and come storming back to find the pig, which had presumably been fast asleep while we and four dogs passed either side of it!

There was a short vicious tussle on the hill side then all went quiet except for the sound of rolling rocks and breaking scrub as they hurtled to the creek. There were flashes of black, brindle and white dog fur and at the front glimpses of a curly coated blue boar just ahead of the



Another beautiful highcountry hut. They look particularly cosy on a winter day

pack. Given how eager the dogs were to finally see a good pig I was fairly certain of the outcome, and once they all hit the bottom they grabbed the pig before he could climb up the other side. No nice clean bail today, there was a bit of canine frustration going on in the creek when we arrived hard on their heels.

Amien stuck the pig and we finally achieved something for our ten days of chasing the mythical highcountry boars around!

Dad and Seals weren't too far away, but we radioed to say that we'd carry the pig out that way. It was a long walk home but we were far from upset about it, we'd finally caught a pig worth some of the travel anyway. It put paid to some of the muttering that had we spent a week straight of hunting at home we'd have 40 pigs under our belt by now....

We made the long trek home, always



made more relaxed by dog stops, and weighed our pig in for our local club competition. It went around 110lb from memory, not nearly the good pig we were after but at least we had something to show for a rather large carbon footprint. I can't really complain though, a boys tour is always a lot of fun and I love any opportunity to put our North Island bush dogs in the open tussock and actually watch what they do. It's good for them to have a change of environment, it helps young dogs learn a bit of range and adds to their maturity by throwing them in a new scenario.

I think we've licked our wounds long enough now, it might be time for another 'boar tour' and I think we'll take things even further and go and check out what the deep south has to offer.

Hopefully I can tell a more positive story after this one!



Amien and Seals with our long-awaited boar

YEAR OF THE RABBIT

WRITTEN BY ~ LLOYD MURPHY

Crack – Thump! The rusty-brown doe hare pitched over, now out of sight in the lush green grass, like dozens before her in the very same paddock over the last six years.

“You did it, you got it!” My friend Alexia made my Browning T-Bolt safe and rose, handing it back to me.

I caught the brass casing she had ejected and handed her the shell she had just used to shoot her first hare. She took it from me triumphantly. I indicated the clump of grass 80-odd yards away and she and her friend Phoebe paced across in the general direction.

It had been an intense stalk, two minutes after me whispering that the hares tend to frequent the fence lines and stay near the shelter belts, there she was, right in the middle of the paddock! The problem with open grassy areas such as this is that as soon as you get prone to use the bipod, the undulations

of the ground and grass often obscures the target from view. Watching through the 10 x 40 Steiners, I'd had Alexia slowly close the gap whenever the hare had been facing away or feeding - head down, and we had managed to get away with it for longer than I had anticipated. We'd spooked three or four already, and once the ears had gone down and back, I'd figured it was “now or never.” We'd made it to a slight rise in the ground, and the animal had still been in view but had inconveniently ducked down in the grass as soon as Alexia had found it through the scope. *“Just wait till it pops up again, right - once you've got the crosshairs on it, slide the bolt forward. Nice and slow, just squeeze gently.”* Crack – whoosh! The grass above the hare's back had parted violently. It had run a little to the right, then turned and come back more or less where it had started, frozen in place and in full view now. “Right, now keep your finger away from the trigger and pull the bolt right out and back in again. Take your time, there's no rush.”

“Why didn't it run away?”

“It doesn't know which direction your bullet came from, take your time, breathe out, gently squeeze when you're ready. Don't worry if it takes off, there's plenty more out here.”

Crack – Thump!

I've learnt the hard way how easy it is to lose hares and rabbits among the long grass, even in Marv's relatively small (7ha) paddocks. Add kale or fodder beet, needle - meet haystack. Now I find a fencepost, distant tree, pivot, thistle, or something I can use to mark the spot and walk in straight. **Therefore, I could see the ladies were a little left and guided them in from further back.** They found the hare, and when I saw their reaction, a realisation dawned upon me. This was a big deal. They were excited, this was fun, and they were really happy. I started hunting rabbits with Dad at about three years old. I think I was about seven or eight when I shot one myself. I've probably shot thousands since.. At 51, I've also never taken home a chamois, tahr or a stag/buck, but I think if I ever did my reaction wouldn't be much different!

For many of us, shooting rabbits is a chore, but not everybody gets to do it. Some of those people might like to have a go - or at least be given a chance to find out whether it's for them. In October 2021, a colleague and now friend of my wife Rachel's, Alexia – asked her if I would take them (her and her friend Phoebe) out for a shot. I've taken lots of people out for their first time





Time to practice shooting and safety

shooting and had them shoot their first rabbit or hare with me afterwards and I've always found it rewarding, so I said yes without a second thought. January 2023 rolled around (the next day would be the first day of the Year of the Rabbit), and the ladies came out for a late lunch. While Rachel was taking them for a stroll around Southbridge, I got the truck ready. When we first arrived on the property, we tagged the gate and set up in a paddock with a slight gully. Some suitable targets (including one I whipped up quickly on the bandsaw while the three friends were out walking) were set up at 25 yards with a safe backdrop, and even a mat went down and the gear arranged upon it. First, we got the rifle out with no magazine and minus the bolt. **We went over the safety rules and explained the reason for each one, emphasising the need to be personally responsible for making sure that a firearm you have in your control is not loaded until it needs to be,** and treating it as if it is,

regardless. (I may have cited the recent case of a particular Hollywood actor as an example of what can happen.) **Talk to anyone who has worked at a gun shop for any length of time – I guarantee they will have a story that will make your blood run cold.**

Once sorted, we added the rotary magazine with one round only in it, fingers away from the trigger, bolt forward once ready and both of our eager pupils scored a nice first hit. Walking down-range in front of the rifle to inspect the target is another opportunity to emphasise the need to ensure everybody knows the rifle is safe. Then both ladies shot another three rounds to make sure the first one wasn't a fluke and we got two great first-timer groups. Assurance for me and a confidence boost for them. After repacking the truck, Alexia quickly volunteered to go first, and we set off on foot to find another target – this time

I pointed out that being low at 25 yards was perfect as the bullet would rise relative to their line of sight and be smack on at the distances we would be shooting at



Alexia thrilled with her shooting prowess

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Phoebe gave us a running commentary on ranges all evening

with some fur on it.

Back to our story, Alexia had just bagged a hare and was justifiably thrilled with her efforts. These two are the very best of friends, but the rivalry was palpable – Phoebe's turn next! I kept Alexia's hare in my pack whole to start with, hoping to get a photo of the two of them together with a trophy each. Alexia dropped back with her friend, my wife Rachel - while Phoebe and I stalked ahead in hunting mode. We quickly came across another hare in the same paddock, but it was barely visible in the long grass and even then, only the head could just be seen. I couldn't get Phoebe to locate it, and she agreed that I should just take it. **I'll admit to a little concern about their possible reaction as we walked up on it - a head shot from 40-odd yards away with a 17 HMR has a fairly predictable effect** - but they were more fascinated than horrified, thankfully. It never knew what hit it and the meat was all there for the taking! The next paddock was full of knee-high

kale, but there was a strip of bare ground along the fence line bordered by a block of mature pine trees on the adjacent property. I call it the "airstrip", and it's my go-to spot for the last hour of light when needs must. **Sure enough, there were rabbits galore down the far end 350 yards away, but the same problem as before exists still – no cover but just enough topography to bugger up a prone shot.** We moved up in full Fudd mode until nearly within the 100-yard mark. Earlier, I had armed Phoebe with my SIG range finder and she was intrigued by it – we had a running commentary all evening about how far away everything was! We miraculously made it into range undetected and belly-crawled another ten yards to utilise a slight rise in the ground. "If we get to that pinecone, you can try from there", I had whispered a few minutes beforehand. Phoebe was on my right, using the kale for cover to get closer, so she slipped quietly behind me and got lined up behind the rifle, to my left. Our target was

soon located and we quietly closed the bolt. Crack – whoosh! As had happened earlier, the first shot missed and rabbits milled about everywhere. A couple scarpered for the shelter belt, but a few more, including "our" one – scampered away then right back to where it had started, presenting an even better view – déjà vu!

We quietly reloaded and had the same conversation about relaxing, breathing, taking our time, the fact that there were plenty more in the next paddock and why it hadn't just run away. **Phoebe didn't miss this time, and the team had one apiece. Yes!**

Now my goal was met, we got a great photo of the friends together with their first animals. I didn't realise how tense I'd become until my nerves subsided, once both of my 'clients' had each bagged a representative trophy of New Zealand's 'Small 2! Our next conversation was about presenting our trophies in a manner appropriate for sharing.

After a quick field dressing session, we headed back towards the truck, and I bagged another rabbit on the way to boost the bag. Phoebe mentioned on the way back that maybe she should have kept a foot, until I pointed out that her one wasn't that lucky in spite of being in possession of four of them! **Two rabbits and two hares are a fairly light haul for that area, but the experience gained and shared was worth a thousand more.** On the way home, we had a tiki-tour of Southbridge and the Rakaia huts area, and once home and cleaned up, I was subjected to a commentary on the carnivore diet followed by both (one more strictly than the other but the genetic differences between them pointed out

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Alexia's hare



Phoebe and her rabbit

later explained why). I heard about the different fats, proteins, ratios, cortisol and insulin levels and biometric pathways, plus a lot of other information that would, quite frankly – break my spellcheck. Rach, with a food science background (and a higher IQ) kept up with her friends, but let's just say I could only feel the bottom of the pool on tippy-toes. One of my day jobs is teaching statistics, so it's probably fair to say I got a taste of my own medicine! Anyway, the animals taken were going to be fully utilised, which I do understand – and appreciate.

The firearms community in general, from target shooters to big game hunters, have copped a bit of a black eye over the last few years. In my opinion, the lion's share of this vitriol is largely misguided and unjustified.

Ironically, the audience for this article is by and large sympathetic to this point, and I want this message to go wider, and I'm hoping some of you might be inspired to help me here. I believe that many people in our community would join us if they could – if they had an "in". Many people don't hunt or shoot because they don't know where to start. They don't have any gear, don't know where to go, don't have a firearms licence, or know anybody who does – well enough to ask for help. They are often wary of firearms or might be unsure whether raising the topic is appropriate. I often work in a corporate environment and have, in the past, been asked specifically not to discuss hunting, shooting, or even fishing with clients for fear of offending somebody. While working in Melbourne once, a client asked about hunting in New Zealand, and another client who overheard my response (during a break, I might add) laid a complaint with the group's MD. I won't bore you with the subsequent fallout, but it was political correctness gone mad –

and if we continually bow down to the lowest common denominator, we are heading for a rather Orwellian future! My point is that we need to find these people who would like to join us and engage them somehow, invite them to sit around the campfire. This yarn only happened because Alexia had the gumption to ask her colleague and friend if her husband would consider taking them for a shot. It might just be a rabbit bomb-up for you, but done right, it could be an absolute game changer and a really enjoyable adventure for someone else, and we have never needed advocacy and support more than we do today.

I'm lucky, I grew up with a gun-mad Dad. As kids, we lived in a world of sharp edges, prickles and cold water, numb toes, burning lungs and sore feet. Sometimes your tent floods, or the mossies give you a long sleepless night. You find out the hard way that your orange sinks in the lake after you peeled it. ... Would I swap that childhood for an iPad and Uber Eats in a high-rise apartment in the city? Not a chance.

I know that Phoebe and Alexia are busting to have another go, and I'll be happy to participate. They are already sharing their story with their extensive corporate networks and have already made some potential connections – a great example of the value of communicating. **Maybe one day, they'll be dragging a 12-point stag off the hill when I'm too old to walk to the letterbox – I'll consider that a win.**

I'd also like to acknowledge and thank my friend Marv Pangborn for not only giving me a place to wander around in exchange for keeping the pests down, but also to share the experience with a few others – it's not a privilege I take lightly.



Owner - Allan Foot

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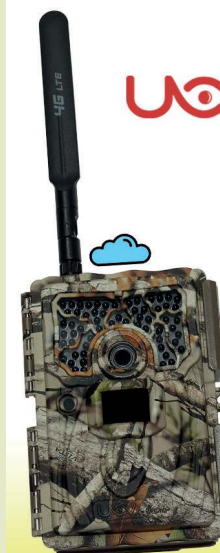
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1 Joshua Hindle (13) with his first stag. An 8 pointer shot with his Dad's Tikka 7mm Rem Mag at 210 yards



2 Layton and Tahlia Fuller from Hawkes Bay Using a Tikka T3X Superlite in 308

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3 George Whitworth (11) with his 10 point East Coast stag. Shot with his Dad's LH 7mm-08

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Georgie Wilson's (11) first stag, shot at 210 yards using her Dad's Tikka T3x 308

4



6

Quinn Collie (6) with his first stag shot in North Canterbury during the 2023 roar using a Tikka T3x in 6.5 Creedmoor



7

Paul Nickson and a stag taken with a Sako 85 308



Hamish Casey, Tikka Aspire 308 - A 12 pointer I managed to secure at 'Spot X' in deep Southland on the very last day of a 14 day trip!

5



Kate Gardner (15) with her first deer! Super stoked to get this young Fallow doe

8

WRITTEN BY ~ IAN GOLDSCHMIDT

HOW BIG IS YOUR FOOTPRINT?

As hunters, we typically cherish nature and desire to ensure its conservation, so that we, and others, may relish it in the future

However, how many of us ponder over our environmental impact while gearing up for our next hunting adventure? Do we contemplate what we purchase and our actions upon returning home? There is a lot we can do to reduce our footprint to ensure the planet remains a great place for our children to hunt.

Here are a few tricks and tips that might help you reduce your footprint for your next adventure.

DEHYDRATED AND FREEZE-DRIED FOODS

Freeze dried and dehydrated food are a light and super convenient for longer trips into the hills. If you do not have a dehydration unit at home, you are likely buying dehydrated food in easy-to-use pouches that only require the addition of hot water to create a warm, nutritious meal.

There are four main brands for us to

choose from in New Zealand and we all have our favourite brand and meal selection. Something that has always bothered me is figuring out what to do with the packaging after finishing my meal. I often see these half burnt in a hut fire rather than being carried out. One thing I didn't know until I started writing this story is that Back Country Cuisine, Radix Nutrition and Real Meals are all members of the Soft Plastics Recycling Scheme. The membership they pay to the scheme helps cover the cost of collection and transport of the materials so they can be processed and repurposed into building materials and plastic fence

posts. All you do is make sure the food pouch is washed and returned to a drop off point. Most major supermarkets have a soft plastic recycling drop off point instore. Look out for the big drop off bins next time you go shopping.

The smaller player in the market, Local Dehy has gone down a slightly different path. All their packaging is 100% home compostable. This means you can get home, give the pouch a wash and pop it in your home compost bin. Local Dehy and Radix nutrition have also invested significantly in 100% renewable energy to reduce their own footprints.

VACUUM PACKING

A good vacuum packer is essential for every hunter to ensure that the game you work hard for is protected from freezer burn and stays in good shape. I often get home from a hunt and grab my vacuum packer to find I'm out of plastic rolls to make new bags!!

Next time you have a new roll of plastic and you're making bags, make them about 20% longer than you need. Then when you go grab some meat from



the freezer, rather than slashing the bag with your knife, cut carefully with scissors along the seal. Once the meat is out of the bag, turn the bag inside out, give it a good wash and dry and pop it back with your vacuum packer to use again next time. It's a great way to reduce plastic waste and save quite a lot of money on new plastic rolls. It's important that when you open the bag you cut the bag along the seal you made last time, not the manufacturers' seals. It won't work if you cut the wrong seal. The plastic from your home kill butcher is also unlikely to work in your home machine as they vacuum differently.

COOKING

Most of us carry a Jet boil or similar fast-boil cooking device on trips into the hills; fast efficient and light. These stoves

operate using 100g gas canisters, which can boil approximately 12L of water, enough for 3-4 days in the backcountry. I have a bin full of ½ or ¼ full canisters which I didn't use up on my last trip. When I'm getting ready for my next trip, I often consider taking some of the half-empty cans with me. However, I usually end up visiting my local hunting and fishing store to buy new ones.



A gas transfer device

Well, that problem is now solved. There are several companies providing a small device that transfers the gas between canisters. You purchase a large canister from your hunting or homeware store and use the device to move the butane mixed gas from a large container to the smaller 100g canister. This not only saves you money but also saves a significant amount of waste. Don't try using the gas from your large BBQ bottle as it's a different gas mix, and follow the manufacturer's instructions.

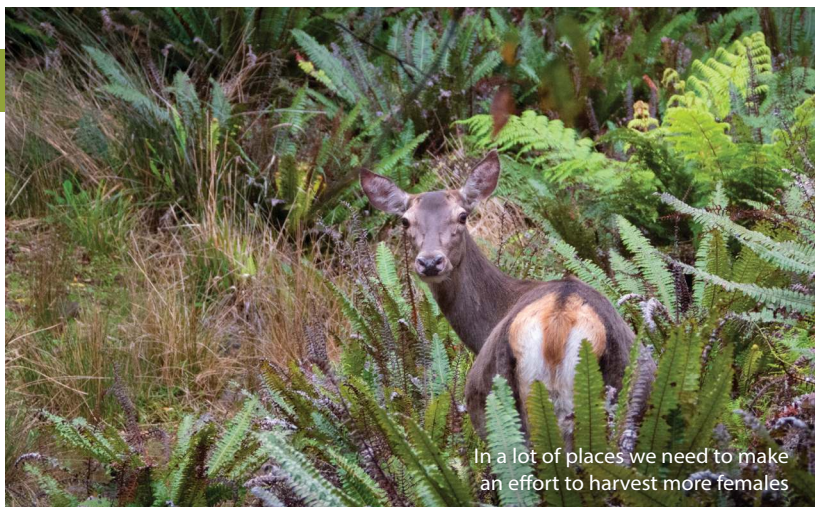
RELOADING

There are a number of reasons hunters decide to reload their own ammunition. For many individuals, the primary motivators are enhanced accuracy and reduced expenses. There is also a sustainability benefit. A large amount of CO₂ is emitted during the mining and smelting process to create the brass that carries the power and projectile of your ammunition. By recycling

Vacuum sealing is a great way to preserve meat, and you can reuse the bags more than once. Portable vacuum sealers from Tussock Outdoor are great for sorting meat in the field



Backcountry Cuisine are members of the Soft Plastics Recycling Scheme



In a lot of places we need to make an effort to harvest more females

the brass and reloading you are preventing this additional CO₂ from being released. Your own personal contribution may be small but collectively it all adds up.

HARVESTING THAT EXTRA ANIMAL

Shooting that cull stag, or better yet, hind, doe or nanny helps protect our forests and natural environments.

Shooting females helps limit the browsing pressure on the environment and results in better-fed animals - healthier, better meat and quality trophies. Just like managing farm pasture, you couldn't let a mob of sheep breed willy-nilly and expect the grass to last.

If you're about to leave a catchment or are walking out from your trip and see a female, take it to fill the freezer, help that environment, and ensure the quality of our trophies.

Happy hunting and we can all make a difference.





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	MODEL	RANGE	FOV	MAG	SENSOR	NZD inc Gst RRP Display
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	FQ35	1800m	12.54° x 10.05°	1.82-14.56, x8		\$4,399.00
	FH35	1800m	7.53° x 5.65°	3.03-2.24, x8	384 x 288, 12 µm, NETD < 20mK	\$3,299.00
	FH25	1200m	10.5° x 7.9°	2.17-17.36, x8		\$2,899.00

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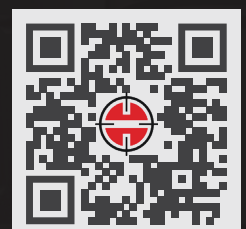
	MODEL	RANGE	FOV	MAG	SENSOR	NZD inc Gst RRP Display
	C32F-R	400m	9.9° x 7.5°	1.00, x8	2560x 1440, 850nm	\$1,399.00
	C32F-RN	350m			2560x 1440, 940nm	\$1,399.00
	C32F-RL	400m			2560x 1440, 850nm	\$1,999.00
	C32F-RNL	350m			2560x 1440, 940nm	\$1,999.00
	C32F-S	400m	8.1° x 6.1°	2.70, x8	2560x 1440, 850nm	\$1,399.00
	C32F-SL	400m			2560x 1440, 850nm	\$1,999.00
	C32F-SNL	350m			2560x 1440, 940nm	\$1,999.00



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ABEL LAKE

WRITTEN BY
CAM MCKAY | POINTS SOUTH

TAHR BALLOT BLOCKS

Looking back to the
Abel Glacier

Located at the Southern end of the Adams wilderness area and at the very head of the Perth valley is Abel Lake which drains the Abel Glacier after it quite literally tumbles off the side of the Garden of Eden ice plateau

It's inspiring country, even if these days the lake is more of a flat patch of gravel and the glaciers no doubt a fraction of their former selves.

This has to be one of the more scenic landing sites with its dramatic topography, and it's even more so in a storm with water just streaming down the steep sides and the river rising quickly. Being more comfortable in steeper terrain will open up a bunch more scope from this landing site, and with camp being about 1000m above sea level **it's certainly a place for axe and crampons if we get early snow - unlike this year.**

The campsite is exactly where you land in the helicopter, on a flat piece of ground that's clear of the surrounding boulders. These boulders are great for securing your tent pegs more firmly in the ground, but just remember to clear the rocks away again so the pilot can

land on the return journey.

The rough travel and numerous gorges the length of the Perth is the reason these

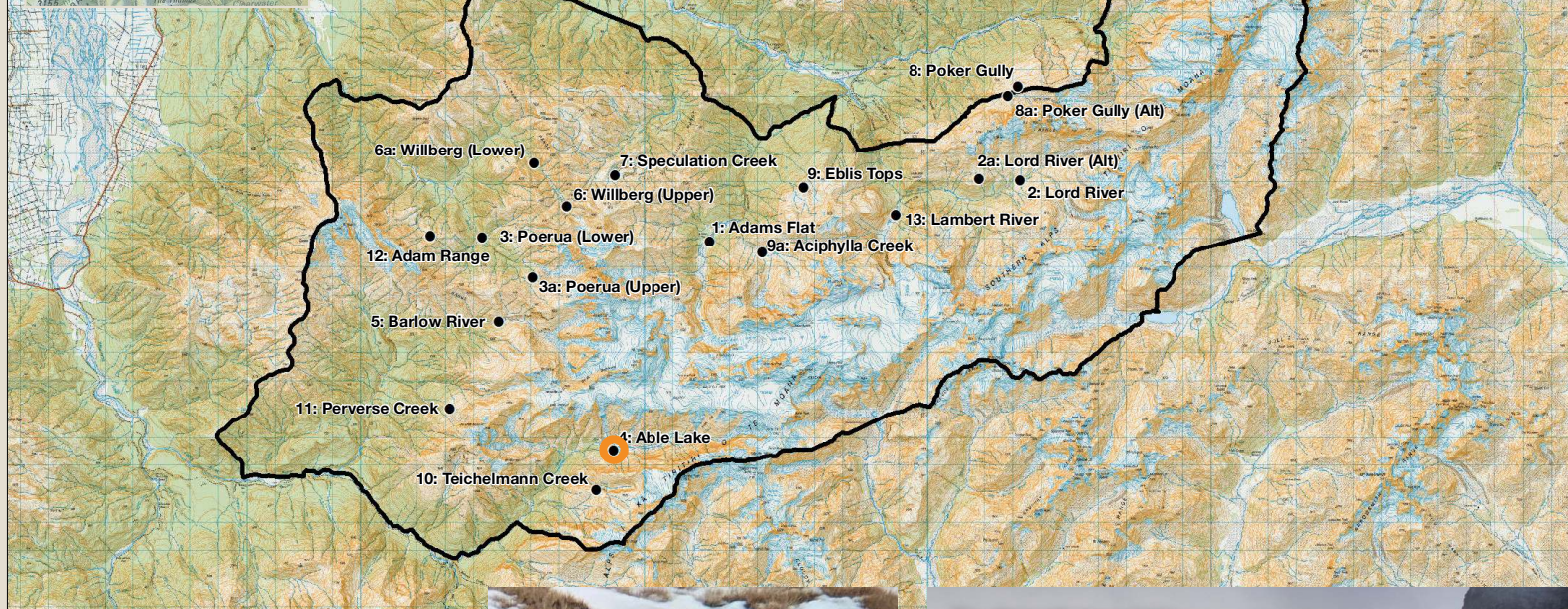
valleys were really only explored from about the 1930's onwards. These days the tracks are well marked and maintained in the lower valley, but with the upper valley untracked I'd doubt it would see much foot traffic. **Although with the ZIP operation now in full swing there may well be a track of sorts.**

There's plenty of glassing to be done even from camp, and with hunting both up stream in the more open country, or down stream in the scrub and slips even as far as climbing into Adverse Creek. With the creek being a rather slippery proposition in the wrong conditions.

Animal numbers are certainly lower these

Looking up-valley
from the campsite





days with the extensive culling in the previous years, and also with an unknown number being shot by ZIP and fed to kea. Which disappointingly, as you can see, included a bull - at least this site in the Perth. But from what I hear the kea are on the increase with a bunch of juvenile birds being seen, and along with it an increase in tents getting ripped up. **So keep those campsites tidy and less appealing to our curious kea.**



A ZIP kea feeding site



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YEATS RIDGE HUT

WRITTEN BY ~ ANDREW BUGLASS | REMOTEHUTS.CO.NZ

Yeats Ridge Hut looking north
along the Toaroha Range

Yeats Ridge Hut is one of three community-maintained huts in the Toaroha Valley in central Westland. It is located at 970m on a flat section of ridge dividing the Zit Creek and Toaroha catchments

The surrounds are alpine peat bog with scattered scrub and open tussock patches, and there are great views out over the Toaroha Valley to the coast. Yeats can be done as an overnighter from the Toaroha roadend, or day trip from Cedar Flat Hut which is the first hut in the main valley.

Access from Yeats onto the Toaroha Range is relatively straightforward and there are good tops routes to a number of other remote huts and bivs in the area. Yeats has never been high-use despite its relative ease of access however visits have increased significantly lately, topping the 30 per year mark. Much of this is due to

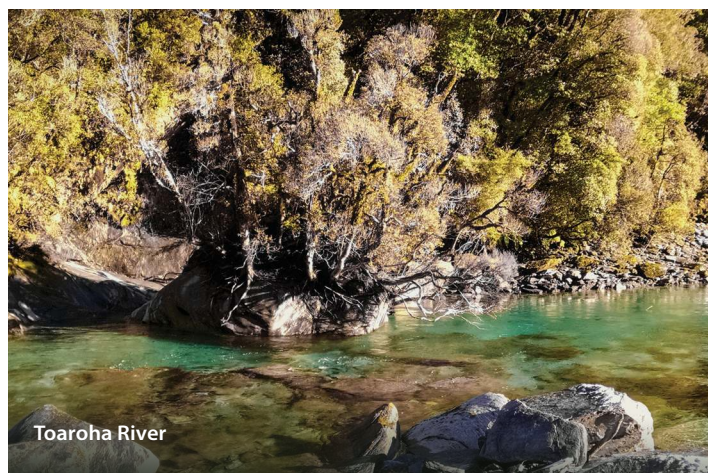
a growing interest in some longer alpine circuits in the area, the most common of which is a loop incorporating Crystal Biv which lies a bit further along the range.

Yeats is a New Zealand Forest Service S81 four-bunk design built in 1960. The cupboard alcoves were removed at some point to create more space, and the

bunks realigned along one wall. Yeats has no fireplace or woodburner, and is unlined, so it can get a bit cold there in winter. The hut blew off its piles in the early 1980's and lay on its side until righted and repaired by the NZFS in 1984. It was painted and resealed by the Department of Conservation in 2004 as a one-off but due to it being designated as minimal maintenance, didn't receive any attention after this. **Over time the hut developed a number of leaks that if unaddressed were going to be sure path to rapid deterioration.** Volunteers had by this time started maintaining the track up to Yeats from the Toaroha Valley and at some point, the Permolat Group signalled its interest in doing some work on the hut.

In 2014 a water tank was installed as part of a Permolat/DOC collaboration and in 2016 some Outdoor Recreation Consortium funding allowed the Group

Looking down on Yeats Ridge and the Toaroha from the Toaroha Range



Toaroha River



The Main Divide
from Toaroha Range



Yeats Ridge Hut

to do a bit of initial maintenance. Not enough to sort the leaks unfortunately, and in 2021 the Back Country Trust stepped in with plans to re-roof the hut and build a porch to stop rain blowing in under the door. **Things stalled for a while when BCT ran short of funds, then in 2022 the Peninsula Tramping Club came to the rescue with the offer of a bequeath from an ex-member who was a keen remote trumper.** BCT was able to scrape enough together to match this and the much-needed work should take place this spring or summer. Volunteers will continue to maintain the track to the hut with the most recent work being undertaken by Liz Wightwick and some

of her Canterbury Tramping Club friends. All in all, it's been an interesting process involving collaborations with, and input from, a number of community groups. Then end result looks to be a positive one for all the mad hutters out there.

Yeats Ridge Hut can be reached in around 6-7 hours from the Toaroha roadend. There is an old and new hut at Cedar Flat (14 bunks in total) around three hours in, with some nice hot pools nearby. Yeats is 2-3 hours from Cedar and involves a steep climb up from the valley floor just upriver from the spectacular Toaroha Gorge. There is a population of shy but curious fernbird in the vicinity of Yeats Hut and if you sit still for a bit at the door, they'll often come

and check you out. **Deer are present in lowish numbers throughout the catchment and chamois can be found as singles, or in small groups on the open tops, all along the range.**

The Toaroha is not a huge river but it is well endowed with huts and bivouacs. For the more adventurous the Toaroha Range provides access to several remote destinations including Crystal, Adventure, Pinnacle, and Toaroha Saddle Bivs, and Top Kokatahi Hut.

More information can be found at <https://www.remotehuts.co.nz/yeats-ridge-hut.html>



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Rusa Deer ***Cervus timorensis***

Male = Stag

Female = Hind

Young = Calf

Rusa deer are widely regarded as one of the hardest deer species to hunt in New Zealand. Their extremely sharp senses, combined with the difficult habitat they live in and their very limited overall range, make rusa deer a real challenge to pursue. Rusa were initially released into the Galatea region in 1907; the deer originating from a population in New Caledonia, which in turn originated from Java, Indonesia. Today, they have the smallest range of all New Zealand deer, occupying only certain areas of Te Urewera near Galatea and along the Whakatane River.

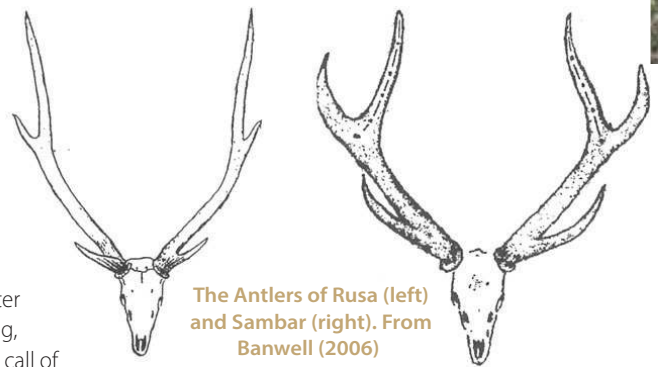
Characteristics & Behaviour:

One of the most interesting characteristics of rusa deer (similar to sambar) is their fur. Being a tropical species, their hair is coarse and bristly, and is often likened to the hair of a pig. This means they get cold easily, and as a result are often found out on sunny faces after a cold night – a characteristic often exploited by hunters. Their antlers usually only grow to six points total and, much like sambar, are cast at quite random times of the year. The rusa rut occurs around May – August, and although combat

between stags is rare, when it does occur it is often extremely vicious, with stags sometimes dying as a result. During the rut, stags roar infrequently, and usually during the hours of darkness. The roar of a rusa is shorter and less modulating than a red stag, and is sometimes mistaken for the call of a cattle beast. Similar to sambar, rusa hinds will emit a sharp bark or “honk” when alerted. However, unlike a sambar (which will stand around and honk repeatedly), once the alarm call is sounded, the entire mob will scatter, usually in different directions.

Rusa or Sambar?

When rusa were first introduced to New Zealand, it was believed that they were simply a smaller version of sambar deer. It wasn't until almost 50 years later (in 1955) that they were officially recognised as a separate species in New Zealand. To the untrained eye, rusa and sambar look very similar. There are, however, a couple of key differences to note. The most obvious one is body size: a sambar stag will stand up to 1.5m high at the shoulder; a rusa usually only around 1m. Another key difference is in the antler configuration. While both deer species usually have a maximum of six points, the main beam of rusa continues to the inner tine, while the main beam of a sambar extends to the outer tine. Large rusa antlers also grow more upwards, while sambar antlers generally grow more outwards.



The Antlers of Rusa (left) and Sambar (right). From Banwell (2006)

What is a trophy?

To be entered in the NZDA Record Books, a rusa stag needs a Douglas Score of at least 160. The current NZ record is 235 DS, taken by Douglas Neal at Snake Hill in 1962.

Further Reading:

Banwell, D. Bruce (2006). *The Rusa, The Sambar and The Whitetail* (pp. 17-76). The Halcyon Press.

Crossland, John (1988). *The Unique New Zealand Rusa*, N.Z. Wildlife, Winter Issue, pp. 30. NZDA, Wellington.

Egan, Howard (2015). *Hunting Fallow Deer in New Zealand*. David Bateman Ltd.





STAG



DRAWN BY ~ FRANCESCO FORMISANO

GAME ANIMALS OF NEW ZEALAND RUSA DEER

HIND



WRITTEN BY ~ LUKE CARE

FENIX HM65R HEADLAMP

Fenix is a relatively new brand to the NZ hunting market, brought to us by Mountain Adventure, the same distributors who introduced us to the Nemo tents a few editions back

The brand is proudly Chinese owned and operated, and has a twenty year heritage in the LED lighting industry. They supply a vast array of products, from tactical and work to sporting and camping, with hunting and fishing needs specifically catered to. With flashlights, headlamps, lanterns and even bike lights they really do it all.

Fenix unashamedly embrace that they are made in Shenzhen, China, but most importantly in a dedicated company-owned facility. This means there are no contractors or sub-contractors, what they make in their own factory is their livelihood. They were also one of the first manufacturers to embrace ANSI - American National Standards Institute, the main organization supporting the development of technology standards in the United States. **This is similar to the international ISO standards, and is in fact the American supporting member.**

The HM65R we have been reviewing

for the last six months is a 1400 lumen, magnesium-alloy headlamp with two lenses – a spotlight and a floodlight.

Two lenses provides redundancy on wilderness trips.

If you drop a rock on one lens (and it'd have to be a heavy one) you'll still have some lighting. At maximum output the spotlight provides 1000 lumen (of four

output levels) and the floodlight 400 (of three output levels). You can activate them both at the same time for the most light, rated to 163m. **The control is kept simple with a button for each lens, this means you can get to the exact light setting you want quicker instead of cycling through seven different modes.** Each button remembers which setting it was turned off on. Off and On required a .5 second hold, and you could lock the buttons with a 3 second hold of both buttons simultaneously. Given the .5 second hold to turn the lights on or off I very rarely bothered to lock the torch.

Within the same panel is a battery level indicator with four blue lights. I found this extremely useful, knowing how much

The blue lights in the centre are the battery indicator, with one button for each lens. The charging point is hidden between the body and the mount

ANSI/FSC	Spotlight Mode				Floodlight Mode		
	Low	Med	High	Turbo	Low	Med	High
OUTPUT LUMENS	50	130	400	1000	8	130	400
RUNTIME	90h	42h	22h	4h	280h	48h	20h
DISTANCE	121ft (37m)	187ft (57m)	331ft (101m)	535ft (163m)	20ft (6m)	98ft (30m)	180ft (55m)
INTENSITY	350cd	833cd	2600cd	6677cd	9cd	220cd	762cd
IMPACT RESISTANCE	2m						
WATERPROOF/ DUSTPROOF	IP68, dustproof/waterproof underwater to 2m						
SIZE	Length: 3.2" (80.5mm) Width: 2.2" (55mm) Height: 1.6" (40mm)						
WEIGHT	3.4 oz. (97g) excluding battery						
INCLUDED	ARB-L18-3400 rechargeable li-ion battery, headband, top headband, headband mount, spare O-ring, charging cable						

*The runtime of turbo is the cumulative time when overheat protection active.

battery is left means you know just how much you can push it in those instances you need more light.

The floodlight is a wonderful camp light. A warm temperature is easy on the eyes, doesn't glare so badly from objects your handling (or the magazine you're reading!) and the soft edges make life a little more comfortable. The minimum setting is only 8 lumens, giving you incredible battery life. For the technically minded it is an XP-G2 R5 neutral white LED.

The spotlight is very bright, but I did really miss a focusable lens.

Being able to focus the beam is really handy for route finding, or for maximizing a low power setting if you're trying to eke out battery life. This was my least favourite feature, I often felt that 1400 lumens could reach a whole lot further than 163m if we could tighten the beam - and you do often need to see a couple of hundred metres in the dark to find navigation features. On the flip side a sealed unit with no moving parts is always going to be more durable, hence the water rating the HM65R achieves. Again for the tech-heads the spotlight uses a Cree XM-L2 U2 white.

The all-metal aluminium and magnesium housing means it has a verified drop rating of two metres from six angles. The IP68 water rating means it can safely be submerged up to two metres for 30 minutes. More than enough for walking in the rain! Despite this it only weighs in at 135g (without the top headband - actually only 97g on its own with no straps), easily comparable with others on the market despite their plastic construction, and with significantly more light output than some

competitors.

The headband was fully adjustable, with grippy rubberized pads inside and reflective panels all over the exterior. **It includes a top strap for those inclined, but the unit was light enough that I certainly didn't feel the need to keep it.**

A huge plus is the decision to use a fast-charge 1.5A USB-C charger, not a proprietary system. You can also use the lamp while it's being charged, so you can plug it in to a powerbank and still keep the lights on in the tent.

The use of a universal 18650 rechargeable Li-ion battery is another brilliant move, it means you can update it in years to come and combined with Magnesium housing this means the HM65R should be a very durable headlamp - the LEDs are rated to 50,000 hours (just shy of 6 years of continuous use). The cool thing about this battery is that you can replace it with two CR123A batteries if needed. Possibly a good idea to leave a pair in your belt pouch for the emergency when the battery and power bank have all run dry

Fenix claim a 280 hour run time on the lowest setting until it goes dead. That is immense, and I didn't leave it going for ten days to test that, but I can say it has never run flat on a trip. Even a winter tahr trip with route-finding using the spotlight every night, temperatures well in to the



Here are the two lenses both active at once to acheive the 1400 lumens



negatives and long hours of darkness to chew up the battery.

I was very impressed by this headlamp and wouldn't hesitate to recommend it. **Especially for those looking for reliability and future-proofing, all for a very reasonable price at \$199**



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INFIRAY

WRITTEN BY ~ JOHNNY BISSELL

TL35 V2 TUBE SCOPE AND FH35R FINDER THERMAL

When discussing advancements in hunting gear over the past decade, many people would consider thermal detection and shooting technology to be among the most significant

It is also the most controversial, but there is no doubt that it is an absolute game changer. Ultimately the degree of challenge you want to have in your hunting is your own personal choice.

In recent years, thermal has undoubtedly become more mainstream, advanced and affordable. There are a lot of people using it, but not all are open that they do. Many in the hunting industry were also once more cautious in their acceptance of thermal. NZ Hunter is a magazine that promotes free range, fair chase, and ethical hunting. **We are also open to technology and equipment advances and believe in everything having its place and people their own freedom of choice, where it doesn't impact others.** The reality is that when carrying out animal management, we often look for the best result, more than the sport of it. In that arena, thermal has no peers, no matter who uses it for that purpose. It is also important to note that DOC policy for all PCL is as follows:

Hunting with any night vision equipment, thermal imaging, infrared

or heat detecting devices is strictly prohibited.

So, to that end, this is officially the first review of thermal equipment that NZH has undertaken. To be clear, I use thermal professionally for wild animal control, which has been an absolute game changer. Where I need an edge on private land, and there is no aspect of sport involved, I swear by it, as do all my colleagues in the industry. The fact is that many of the animals we control are most active at night. Whether it is finding 'possums in foliage, wallabies, rabbits and hares in new plantings, apex predators, or ungulates hitting plantings, new lambs or winter feed, thermal plays a huge role in success. Finding things quickly and easily in broken country in daylight is also easier with thermal, especially when they are small animals. Essentially, thermal equipment finds the heat signature of

anything and presents that to the viewer on a screen as shape and definition, which helps identify what the viewer is looking at. Anything with heat will show up, so warm-blooded animals cannot hide out in the open. It's as simple as that. They can, however be screened behind vegetation and structure that blocks the thermal signature. So, as against optical locators (eg binoculars), thermal makes warm things stand right out. With binos, you need to view and define everything in your view. With thermal you can scan quite quickly and simply look at anything with a heat signature. **To demonstrate how effective this tech is, while I was using the Infiray finder on rabbit and hare control, I compared it to a standard spotlight.** In short, I could scan a paddock and straight away pick up six to ten animals without trying. When I swept the spotlight over the same area, I was lucky to pick up more than a couple, despite knowing where they were. I depended mostly on eye shine at distance, which doesn't always happen.

Infiray is a line that has been around for some time and is gaining an increasing share of the New Zealand market. When I spoke to various professionals about Infiray, all had heard of it, and many were considering looking more closely at it for use. Let's look at the two items I tested.

FINDER II FH35R MONOCULAR

Two key advances in more recent thermal finder technology are that of portability and the inclusion of a laser range finder. The FH35R ticks both boxes. While many thermal finders are upright or cylindrical, the FH35R is flat in shape, which actually works very well. There are several types of straps provided to hold and carry the unit. I ended up just keeping it as is and carrying it in the chest pocket of my jacket. It was protected there, and quick and easy to access. The 450g weight means that it wasn't a problem to carry. The eyepiece and lens sit on the right-hand side, while the range finder sits on the left. The rubber eye cup can be rotated, and the unit's design means it can be held and used comfortably left or right-eyed and handed. The power button can be pressed quickly to put the screen to sleep and then bring it back quickly as needed. I found the unit easy to operate one-handed and put to sleep as I slipped it back into my pocket - nice and simple, and it prolongs battery life. Not that the battery life was a big issue. It is listed as up to six hours, which is a long time at night. It is easy enough to carry a spare, and the charger provided does two batteries at a time which works well when away on a job. The batteries can be swapped out easily in the field, and the unit runs the lithium 18650s, which are a lot more common and cheaper to buy than some model-specific options in other makes.

The unit has a magnification of 2x-8x, which, to be honest, is plenty. The reality is that as you increase in magnification with any finder, the definition can suffer. I stuck almost entirely to 2x. It gave the greatest field of view for finding and also the best perceived definition.

When it comes to definition, the FH35R is listed as having a resolution of 640x512 pixels. If you don't understand this tech speak, don't worry. All you need to know is that it is at the top end, is good and especially so for the price. There is so much technical speak around this and so much to understand. For example, pixel pitch plays a part alongside definition. The key thing here is that I never felt that I didn't have enough definition or that I couldn't safely identify animals. Experience helps here, but definition is a very important place to start. I could comfortably identify between hedgehogs and rabbits at 200-plus metres. The high-end thermal finder that I normally use was slightly better, but the improvement didn't align with the difference in price, if

that makes sense.

The detection distance is listed as up to 1800m, and the closest I got to testing this was detecting and identifying several deer at 1600m. That is really good going. Remember that there is a difference between detecting a heat signature and identifying the target. I was able to do both. Excellent! I would note that I would expect anyone to get closer, and re-check the image to confirm.

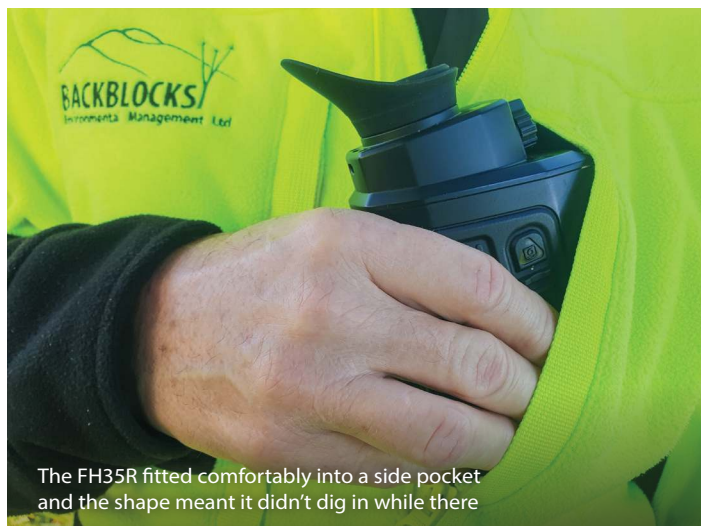
For me, the laser range finder was an absolute game-changer. It works up to 800m, and anyone who has hunted at night will know how hard it is to judge distance then. The LRF was easy to use and accurate. I discovered that having faith in the range allowed me to take more shots with confidence.

Previously, I would have been more cautious in my approach, especially on rabbits and hares with my 17HMR. Pigs were also easier, as often you have to guess their size. How else will you know if it is a small one close or a big one further away, aside from minor body shape differences? Best to remove all the maybes.

Much of the testing period was dogged by really bad weather, and so the fact that the unit is rated to IP67 gave me confidence that it could handle the conditions. And it did. So, what else can the FH35R do?

- **Photo/ video recorder with built-in 32GB storage capacity**
- **WiFi connection and App supported**
- **Different hue settings for better visual quality**

I have seen a number of people just buying a thermal scope to keep costs down, and this breaks the golden rule of safe firearms handling. Never point a firearm at something you don't intend to shoot. A unit like the FH35R is both portable and easy to use. It is quite compact and not too heavy and will ensure that you operate both safely and effectively. **I really liked the FH35R, and I give this unit the tick. I would be very comfortable having this unit as my only finder.**



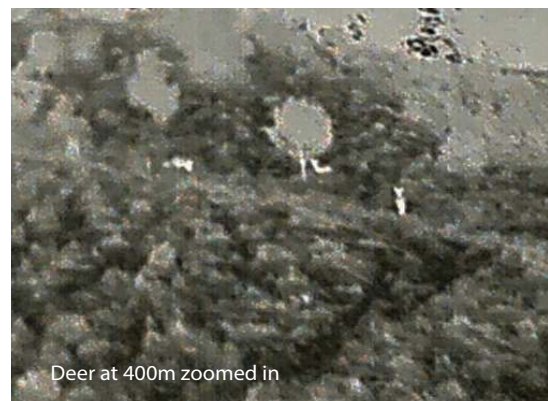
The FH35R fitted comfortably into a side pocket and the shape meant it didn't dig in while there



The FH35R proved really handy on pig work in open country at night. It was often easier to watch the dogs progress through the viewer than peering at a GPS screen



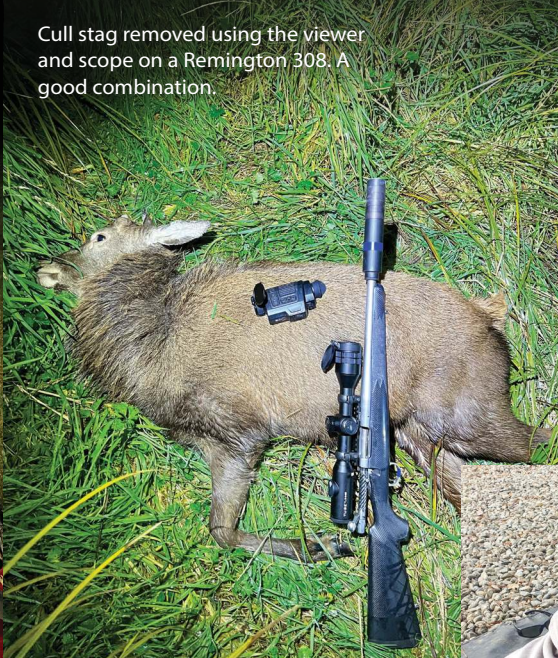
Feral cat zoomed in at 80m



Deer at 400m zoomed in



Cull stag removed using the viewer and scope on a Remington 308. A good combination.



Charging the scope was very simple via USB



TL35 V2 TUBE SCOPE

It's clear that advancements in thermal technology have been particularly noticeable in thermal scopes. It wasn't that long ago that thermal scopes looked nothing like a scope. These days most look a lot more like their optical counterparts. The TL35 V2 looks just like a normal scope, albeit a bit bigger, and it is very similar in look and dimensions to a longer-range high magnification scope. I mounted it on a Remington model 7 in .308Win and ran Hornady's excellent Whitetail ammunition with 150gn Spire points through it. This load is an accurate and proven performer on deer and pigs. The scope has a 30mm tube, and I mounted the rings straight onto a picatinny rail. It cleared the bolt handle nicely and enabled a good cheek weld. The 35mm front objective on the scope enabled plenty of clearance with the barrel.

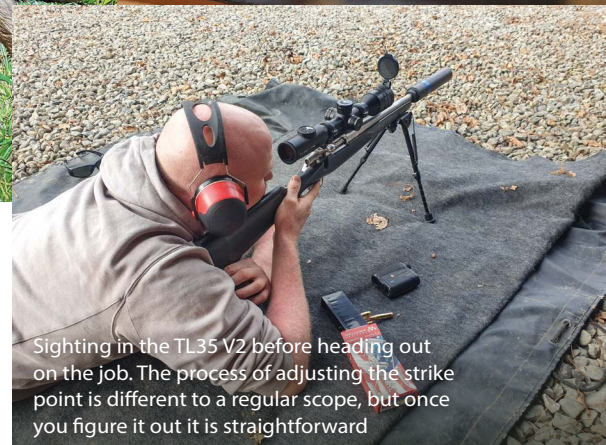
The TL35 V2 is described as a mid-range scope. This is apparent in its resolution, which sits at 384x288 pixels, as compared to around 640x480 in high-end scopes. Let me be clear though - I found the resolution to be fine. The pixel size is 12um, standard for most thermal. Aside from the resolution, I am going to come right out and say that there is nothing else about this scope feature-wise that made me feel like I was cutting corners. **The features and functionality were of top-notch quality.** And remember that the price reflects the resolution, with this model sitting at about 60% of the cost of a high-end scope. So, the biggest question on everybody's lips is, is it good enough? The short answer is yes! And particularly at lower magnifications and when paired with a finder unit like the FH35R with its higher resolution. I found it clearly defined enough to shoot

accurately and safely at all ranges required on all sizes of animals. I could find animals and an aiming point quickly, just like an optical scope in the daytime. Most of my shooting was under 200m, and it worked very well. A colleague did a run with the gear and was taking animals comfortably up to 350m away with the same conclusions. The longest shot for me was 250m. I liked this scope and found it easy to carry and use.

If you have never operated a thermal scope, you should know that it functions a bit differently from an optical scope. This is a digital scope and, as such, needs a different approach around adjustments when sighting in. I won't go into it here, but once you work it out, you will find it quite simple. We used tin foil on a target as the aiming mark. Thermal spots are also available. The reticle also took some installing until we realised it was there and simply needed adjusting. What was it again about men and reading instructions? I witnessed this in a hunting shop too, where the salesperson couldn't find it for a client. Suffice it to say that with thermal, everyone has their own preference with the image settings, and once you have them set, you won't need to change much. Once I had the scope set to what I wanted, and after trying all the options, I didn't change it.

So, what else can the TL35V2 do?

- **3x-12x magnification (ideal for any situation)**
- **Built-in 18650 battery (not removable) with external micro USB plug-in charger. Super easy to recharge.**
- **Option to add an additional removable 18500 battery for an additional 2.5 hours of battery life if needed (I never did)**



Sighting in the TL35 V2 before heading out on the job. The process of adjusting the strike point is different to a regular scope, but once you figure it out it is straightforward

- **Up to 15 hours of battery life with this setup**
- **32GB built-in memory**
- **950g weight (without battery)**
- **1800m detection range**
- **OLED display resolution of 1024x768 OLED**
- **Option to connect LRF through Bluetooth**
- **Camera and video with built-in microphone for voice-over recording**
- **Rated IP67 for waterproof level (same as FH35R)**

The TL35 V2 worked well. It really was business as usual. Find, stalk and range with the FH35R, then re-confirm ID and second that, then shoot with the 308 and TL35 V2 combo. To be honest, nothing about this set up and combination made me wish I had anything else. My colleague and I utilised this approach to handle animals of various sizes depending on the task at hand. My work mate had a similar view. He, like me, was accustomed to using top-end gear and didn't feel short-changed either by using the InfiRay. We agreed that we would happily run this combination on all our jobs. That is high praise, given how fussy we both are.

So, I will leave each of you to make your own minds up on thermal. **Suffice it to say that the two items tested performed well and are definitely worth considering if you are in the market for thermal.**



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TL35 V2 TUBE SCOPE

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Optical Magnification	3x ~ 12x
Objective Lens	35mm
Pixel Pitch	12µm
Eye Relief	70mm
Frame Rate	50Hz
Field of View	7.5°x5.6°
NETD	≤40mk
Weight	<950g
Dimensions	385 x 85 x 75mm
Max Battery life	15 hours
Built-in memory	32GB



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Infiray FH35R



FH35R LASER RANGEFINDER

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Detection Range	1818m	NETD	≤35mK
Laser Rangefinder	800m	Weight	400g
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Optical Magnification	2x ~ 8x	Built-in memory	32GB



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THERMAL IMAGING

HUNTERS ELEMENT ARETE PACK SYSTEM

WRITTEN BY ~ LUKE CARE

The 75l pack option on the Arete frame

The Arete Pack system is a range of modular packs built to make use of a single frame

The idea being that you ease your investment in packs by purchasing the Arete frame, and then your selection of a 25l, a 45l and/or a 75l pack. They also offer the advantage of in-trip modularity, so that you can pack in with the 75l, set up basecamp and then continue to hunt with the 25l or 45l.

This means you have a heavy duty daypack that can realistically bring home a load of meat without demolishing your back and shoulders as it has a proper aluminium harness frame. The range offers the three packs, but also the option of a quiet Hydrafuse in Desolve Veil camo or the more hard-wearing 500D Cordura in Stone Green. With alpine hunting in mind we used the 45 and 85l packs in Cordura. The Hydrafuse is a great quiet option for people hunting the bush primarily. The harness itself has full adjustability, and a good degree of padding that was body-mapped to contact your body in all the right places.

A standout feature I do really like is the expandable load shelf. This is a fabric sling that pulls out when you expand the space between the frame and the pack, allowing you to stow heavy items like meat right against your back - and let the blood drip away rather than making your pack smell! This is integrated with the frame so you can use it with all of the packs.

To help with this Hunters Element have designed the frame to have a massive

50kg weight rating, finally a rating realistic for carrying significant meat and gear loads.

Another feature common across the range is the rifle scabbard. This is a sleeve between the frame and the pack, and on top of the load shelf once that is filled, providing a highly protected position for the scope.

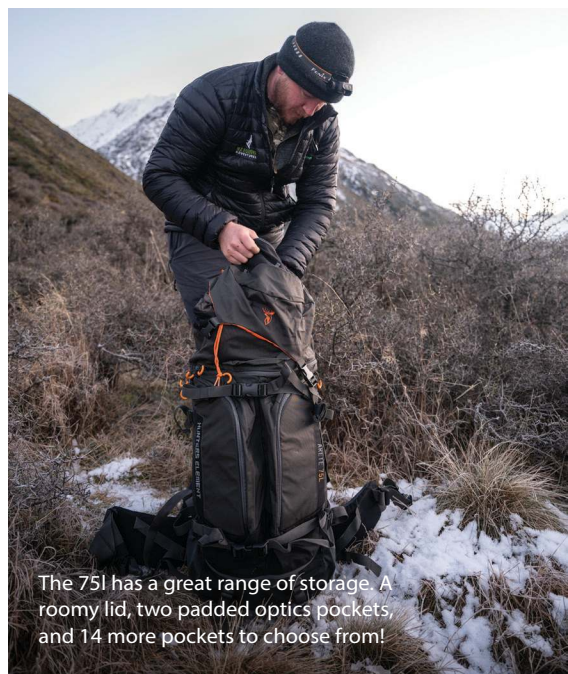
The scabbard is in a muzzle-down position and worked extremely well for the short 28 Nosler build we profiled in the magazine. The scabbard can accommodate a suppressor, though it does become a little tight. Long rifles with 26" plus barrels might stick up a fair bit. The downside is that the scabbard is captive. After spending a roar in the bush you'll have a handful of scrub that falls down inside. I also can't see any drainage provided there, so it might get a bit damp. I didn't get a chance to test that it in heavy or prolonged rain though.

There are other brands who make use of the load shelf system, so I was interested to see how Hunters Element had approached the problem. Theirs hinges

from the top, so you disconnect the side straps, loosen the base and hip straps, then slide the frame down out of the fabric sockets at the top before laying it over so you can access the meat shelf.

Once the meat is placed the side straps between the bag and the frame provide some lateral support to the package in the meat shelf. Other systems I've used can let the meat slide out the side, which gets very annoying very quickly. This system works best if you either keep the hindquarters whole, or package the meat in a game bag. Individual cuts will just fall out the side.

The downside is that there a lot of straps which adjusting needed. It does make for a secure load, but it can be a little tedious when you're in a rush to get back to camp at a reasonable hour or doing it with cold



The 75l has a great range of storage. A roomy lid, two padded optics pockets, and 14 more pockets to choose from!

numb fingers. To use the meat shelf you have to release six clips, two of which you need to thread the tails into the bag as well, and then loosen the hip tensioners - so 10 attachments that require adjustment.

The fixtures are nice and heavy, with speciality Duraflex locking buckles on the front. These are great for when you have heavy antlers catching on scrub and placing a lot of strain on the buckle tensioners, so often the conventional type just slip.

The optics pocket is an interesting addition, providing great protection and quick access. It would be great if the hard foam was removable for trips when you're really stripping weight, but it does protect not only the optics really well, but the contents of your pack when you lean back on rocks to glass. It just fit my Zeiss Victory 85mm spotter at 445mm long, on the longest diagonal length. Little Swaro's like the ATX 65mm or the tiny ATC will breeze in, but I'm not sure a big 95mm would fit.

An often overlooked feature is the placement of the bottom of the lid straps, Hunters Element have noted this and placed the end of the strap well down on the pack, meaning you can pull the lid right down tight when the pack isn't completely full, and also use it to help strap things to the back. **The lid has a roomy top pocket which suits me perfectly, I like having all my easy-access stuff up there. If you're more of an organiser don't worry, there's 17 pockets to choose from!** You can also extend the straps on the lid to create room for another 10 litres in the pack when you're really carrying the kitchen sink.

The packs are all water bladder compatible, and have a blaze orange rain cover provided.

Ultimately weight is a bit of a drawback for the Arete system. The frame weighs 1.49kg, and when you add the 1.88kg 75l you're soon up to 3.37kg. Once you add a 1.38kg 45l daypack to the load into basecamp the system is at the heavy end despite being named after an alpine feature.

The system is well thought out and full of features. It's comfortable and

The rifle scabbard keeping the Bush Piglet safe and secure, and the speciality Duraflex buckles cranked tight to hold the tahr head in place on the 45l pack



The load shelf in use with a set of tahr hindquarters held securely in place

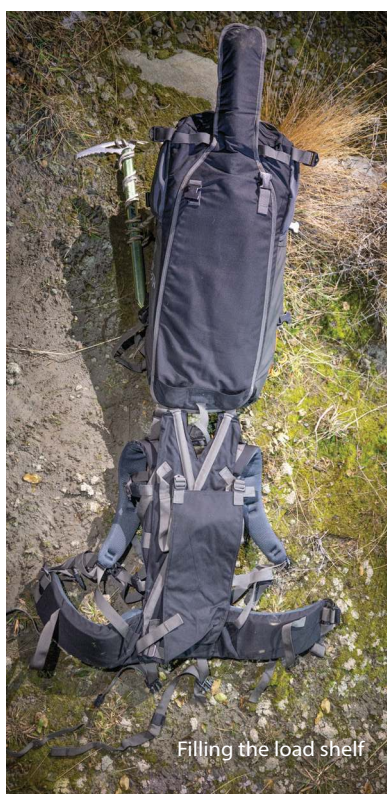


easy to use, the only minor drawbacks are the weight and the complexity of the straps for the load shelf. Hunters Element also have a great series of informative videos if you need any more lessons in how to operate the pack system, **so check out the website.**

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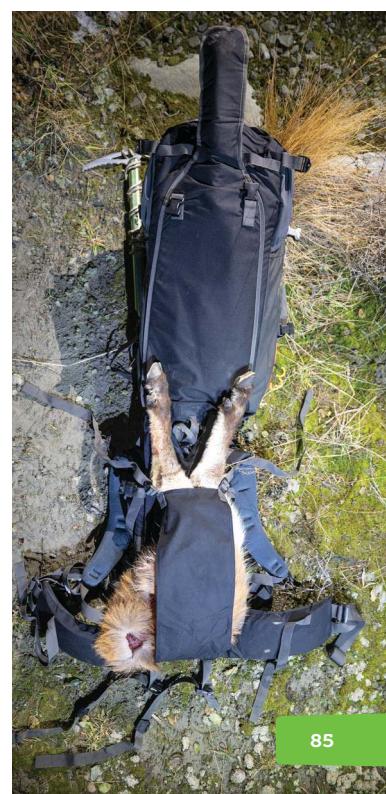


Photo Gallery

The winning photo receives a Hunting & Fishing voucher to the value of \$100. Send all your photos to editor@nzhunter.co.nz

Note: Photos must be of a suitable size for printing - a minimum file size of 1MB is preferred.



Grand Winner

Suni Floerl (7) Today I shot my first rabbit! My Dad and I had to get up very early. I love my 22!



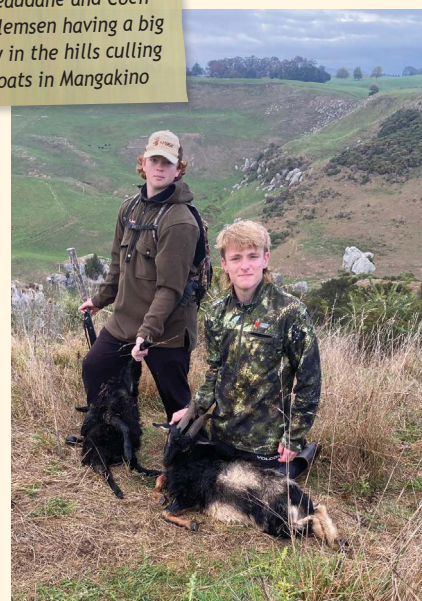
Claude O'Sullivan Lobb and Ryan with a fat summer sow



Laura (13) shot her first deer during the roar. A 10 point Red stag, neck shot with Dad's .308 at 200m on Gisborne public land



Josh Barbour (9) my first Fallow buck, out of DOC land in Waverly, Taranaki. Shot with Dad's Remington 243



Beaudane and Coen Willemsen having a big day in the hills culling goats in Mangakino



Olive and Pearl de Jong with a spiker. Shot by Dad but carried out by them



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UP IN FLAMES

WRITTEN BY ~ COREY CARSTON

Whether you call yourself a duck shooter, a duck hunter, or a waterfowler; whether you're only an opening weekend hunter, a casual hunter or a rabid hardcore die-hard hunter, opening day is without a doubt the most exciting day of the year

If you're anything like me, you've been looking forward to that sacred day since last year's opener. Also, if you're anything like me, you'll find it's also the busiest and most stressful time of the year!

By the time the roar is over, it's time to start actioning the plans made last season. Maybe you've been wanting to cut down that irritating willow tree you've been cursing for years, or maybe you've been putting off repairing the maimai that always seems to slip your mind until a few days before the season starts, only to be forgotten about again for another year. **Then there's the ongoing stuff like scrubbing the blinds, re-weighting decoys, getting the dog back up to speed and preseason scouting.** I'm not only considering the opening day, but also the next few months of the season. This involves setting up multiple maimais, which naturally consumes a significant amount of my valuable time.

If you're anything like me, you will have found that anything at this time of year can potentially stuff you up.

It could be something like a wedding or family event. Maybe an issue with the truck or sometimes the boat. It could be a big rain event that ruins your spot or makes access hard or, worse still, a drought and a dry pond.

It could even be the worry of being able to take the dog into your chosen hunting area. Recently we've had numerous toxic algae blooms that are extremely hazardous to dogs and, as any keen dog handler knows, there are certain places that simply aren't viable to hunt without a good retriever.

I have had more than my share of dramas in the lead-up to opening, but with the exception of the old man's heart attack days before opening (I've already written about this particular setback!), they were nothing compared to what the 2022 and 2023 openers had in store for us.

2022 started off with a very low lake level which was going to make getting to the duck hunt and then up to the pond much more challenging than it would otherwise have. Turns out the low lake level would be the least of our worries.

A rather innocuous text from a cousin on Friday said, "There's a fire in the wetland."

Over the years, there has been the odd small localised fire down there and a couple of boomers. Many years ago, one devastated a huge area of mānuka and

wetland scrub but fortunately burned well away from both of my precious spots.

Saturday morning saw Dad and I watching at least nine helicopters equipped with monsoon buckets valiantly trying and failing to get this monstrous beast of a fire under control. As we watched on in horror, more and more our most treasured place went up in flames. **I'd only be guessing how high some of the flames were, but they appeared to be at least three or four times the height of the scrub it consumed.** With lots of the mānuka in the ten-foot plus range, you can get an idea of how high they were.

At this time of year, our wind patterns normally result in the cursed easterly wind that tends to put trout off the bite, and as it's only a breeze, it's never any good for goose hunting. Today though, I would have done almost anything for an easterly. Instead, we had a rare westerly that pushed the fire front deeper into the wetland making things ten times worse.

We watched through the thick smoke and occasionally caught a glimpse of where my Uncle Phillip and Kevin usually hunt. Sadly, their hunting spot was completely destroyed. They had two maimais in their bay, positioned to make use of variable winds, and it was plain to see they were both gone.



The pond after the fire



Saturday morning saw Dad and I watching at least nine helicopters equipped with monsoon buckets valiantly trying and failing to get this monstrous beast of a fire under control



The sole surviving decoy. Hand made burlap wrapped foam that managed to survive the inferno



The area looked like something out of an apocalypse movie



Even more of a worry was the potential fate of our beloved family hut, built way back in the 60s, and which was in the path of the fire. We watched on, fearing the worst in our minds, wandering back to all the great times and memories that we thought were gone.

It wasn't until a few days later we learnt that the air crews had just managed to save all of the huts down there - something that was greatly appreciated by all the hunters and fisher folk who stay there.

Even after weeks had passed, the wetland was still considered an

active fire front, even though no visible flames were present. There were still fires burning deep down in the peat that gave off no signs, and the worry for fire and rescue was a person could quite easily walk into one of these hot spots and be killed. Reportedly some of these spots were burning at many hundreds of degrees.

It wasn't until well into winter and after heavy dumps of rain and some rather cool temperatures that we were allowed to head into the affected land and survey the damage.

Walking up there was a very sad

and sobering experience. It was like something out of an apocalypse movie. Every single piece of scrub was burnt. Because the fire went through so fast, it didn't burn the sticks to the ground meaning there was a chaotic jumble of skeletal dead standing mānuka. **What had been a riot of deep green was now a twisted black and grey wasteland.**

After only walking through it for a few minutes I looked down at my clothes, and could see they were absolutely covered in carbon.

Not surprisingly, both of our maimais



Kiera back in action on the pond

were totally burnt to the ground. The only way we could tell where they stood was a bare area littered with rusty nails. Over the years, accessing the area required a lot of effort, so we had stored extra equipment there. Unfortunately, all of it was destroyed. While I was sifting through the wreckage I found a large glob of lead from some decoys. The temperature was so high that it had caused them to melt. One of the pilots must have spotted our old boat, and judging by the splash of green around it, had dumped a heap of fire retardant on top of it and managed to save it for us.

So, at the start of the 2022 season and with no access to the pond, we reluctantly decided to head out into the middle of the lake. We had hunted this years before when we were young chaps and had always vowed to come back one day and give it a good nudge.

We put in a big effort and threw the kitchen sink at it decoy-wise. I borrowed my mate Lyndon's A-frame blind and to make it as invisible as possible and dug one of the biggest holes we'd ever dug to get it as low as we could. We even went as far as to plant numerous tussocks around us to break our profile up even more.

Once we were done and we sat back looking at our work, it hit us that as good as it looked, it wasn't the same as the pond and we didn't like that feeling one little bit.

By the time we called the hunt on the Sunday, we'd decided that, despite having a pretty good weekend duck numbers

wise, it wasn't nearly as fun, exciting or as rewarding being out on the lake as being on the pond.

2023 saw us plotting and planning a return to the pond. We knew we had a massive job on our hands, needing to build two maimais, cart fresh scrub to cover them and haul a new batch or gear up there plus trying to remove as much dead scrub as possible away from the pond edges.

The first thing was to cut a new track in as the dead-standing scrub would not only rip our clothes and gear to shreds but would also have made it unsafe for Kiera the lab. So one day over Easter instead of chasing roaring Reds, I bit the bullet and headed down to cut as much as possible.

The least said about that, the better as it took forever. Once I was done, I had basically achieved nothing so when Stacy arrived back in the country, plans were made to spend days up there building and cutting down all the dead wood.

Regrettably, my job and a couple of days spent fishing on the river, as well as a day hunting Fallow deer, interfered with my plans. In hindsight, it would have been more beneficial to spend the day at the pond. When we did eventually make our way down there the reality of what lay ahead of us really kicked in. **There was weeks' worth of work to get it back to what we had envisioned in our heads.**

We simply had to resign ourselves that getting things sorted was going to be a long term thing, instead of what we

hoped would be done in a season.

The weekend before opening therefore was a pretty busy one, while Stacy and Jake built our rather basic but effective maimais (we have two to cover all wind situations). After a couple of years with ducks sliding over our shoulders presenting us with less than ideal back on shots, we built a second one directly opposite us. No matter which direction the wind blows, we were able to get good front-on shots. Even if the wind is not ideal for this, we can still get decent side shots. While they were building, I was on the end of a chainsaw, cutting back as much of that horrible dead scrub as possible. I swear that for every bit I cut, another two took its place.

By the end of the day, we were all exhausted but had achieved more than we should have.

Opening day saw us exceptionally nervous. The first ducks of the morning are always a big event, and despite not talking about it out loud, we all knew that the first half an hour's hunting would determine whether or not our return to the pond was the right thing.

Barely had the first exciting crumps from other hunters in the distance dissipated than we heard the unmistakable swoosh of unseen mallard wings above us. A quick fumble to find the calls around our necks and a few quacks later and there were four dead ducks on the water and three hunters secretly breathing a sigh of relief.

Despite seeing very few ducks (due to



Friday before 2022 opening - digging in the A frame to get it as low as possible. Despite having a good hunt it just wasn't the same as being at the pond



Despite the blaze the koura that live in the pond survived



We were extremely lucky and very grateful that the fire fighters saved the boat for us

Jake and one of the new maimais

a lower than normal population thanks to an almost-drought down south) the ducks that showed up often turned themselves inside out in their desperation to get into the decoys.

Unlike other years there wasn't nearly as much circling. This was great as with the mānuka all but gone, the sound of gunshots close by seemed to be way louder than normal, thus spooking any ducks that did circle. Our theory was that the scrub deadened down much of this noise.

By the time Sunday pack-up time arrived we had managed to obtain a surprising number of birds, far more than what the pessimists among us thought we would have bagged. The hunting definitely had changed, and we were going to have to adapt to it. One of the big things we noticed without the scrub was that any ducks that hit the land ran as fast as their

legs would take them away from the pond, instead of staying put and hiding like they usually did. We had envisioned they would head for the water and the odd flax bush surrounding it. And when I said they ran, they fair legged it.

We now know that every year for our probable hunting life- time is going to be a lot harder work than it was, but also every year will get easier and better once we can cut all the dead scrub down. We know the ducks are still going to come and already were seeing the first lots of seedlings slowly poking their heads



through the dirt.

Our wonderful spot isn't ruined.

Before I wrap this up I'd like to do a belated thanks on behalf of all our crew to the brave pilots and firefighters who saved our huts, and also to the coordinators who saved as much of our beloved play ground as they did.



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THE GAC UPDATE

WRITTEN BY ~ TIM GALE | GENERAL MĀNAGER

Who's got your vote?

The Game Animal Council has dedicated this month's column to providing an insight into the policy of our major political parties as they head into the election.

In July the GAC wrote to the Conservation, and Hunting and Fishing Spokespeople of Labour, National, ACT, The Green Party, Te Pati Māori and New Zealand First to provide information and help hunters understand the various party positions on questions regarding game animals, their management and hunting.

We have presented the responses in alphabetical order based on party name and without any commentary, allowing you to judge for yourselves the merits of each party's position.

Thanks to ACT's Nicole McKee, Eugenie Sage of the Green Party, Labour's Willow-Jean Prime and National's Todd McClay for participating. Unfortunately, Te Pati Māori and New Zealand First did not respond.

Will your party commit to upholding Te Mana o te Taiao Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy 2020, including the principle that 'reaching a balance to ensure that valued introduced species (including deer, tahr, chamois and wild pigs) continue to provide the benefits they are valued for, while also ensuring that indigenous biodiversity thrives is a key challenge for Aotearoa New Zealand?'

If so, will you continue to provide support and invest in the Te Ara ki Mua Wild Animal Management Framework that seeks to achieve this?



ACT supports a balance between conservation values and the right of New Zealanders to hunt introduced species such as deer, tahr, chamois and wild pigs.



The Green Party is committed to implementing the Biodiversity Strategy so its five outcomes are achieved by

2050. Biodiversity monitoring by DOC shows that ungulates, primarily deer and goats, have become more widespread. They now occur at 83% of sites monitored compared to 63% of sites in 2013. Monitoring also shows a national shift in forest composition with a decline in tree species preferred by ungulates. For our indigenous plants and wildlife to thrive we need more effective control of deer, tahr, and goats in areas where their numbers and their browsing and trampling are affecting forest and vegetation health. Feral pigs have major impacts on invertebrates.

The Framework was developed to enable localised collaborative work between DOC, GAC and other stakeholders, and hapū and iwi to improve the management of deer, wild goats, feral pigs, tahr and chamois. It is not a strategy for active control of wild animals. Further work is needed to improve wild animal management to restore the health of indigenous habitats.



Yes, the Labour Government launched Te Mana o te Taiao in August 2020 as a way forward that envisions Aotearoa New Zealand as a place where ecosystems are healthy and resilient, and people embrace the natural world.

Yes, the framework supports the implementation plan for Te Mana o te Taiao, the key actions being to reduce browsing pressure to support ecosystem resilience by improving monitoring, delivery, and evaluation of wild animal



ACT Party Conservation
Spokesperson, Nicole McKee



Green Party Conservation
Spokesperson, Eugenie Sage



Labour Party Conservation
Spokesperson and current Minister
of Conservation Willow-Jean Prime



National Party Hunting and
Fishing Spokesperson, Todd
McClay

management. Furthermore, to coordinate efforts and enhance capacity across the people, organisations, and agencies involved in wild animal management.



National has recently announced in our Hunting and Fishing Policy called Recreation, Culture and Food, that we will introduce a 'Valued Introduced Species' designation for game animals, trout, and salmon into existing legislation. This will harmonise their treatment so they are properly managed including herd sizes for better biodiversity outcomes.

Will your party consider supporting and, where appropriate, help facilitate community and hunter-led game animal management initiatives that seek to achieve low density, high-quality game animal herds while improving conservation outcomes?



Yes. ACT support the active involvement of hunters in the management of game animal herds.



Hunter led management has not reduced tahr numbers to the levels required by the Himalayan Tahr Control Plan. DOC monitoring

shows that deer numbers have increased significantly in areas such as Raukumara Conservation Park, Kaimanawa, Kaweka, Ruahine and Pureora forest parks and Arthur's Pass and Westland/ Tai Poutinui national parks. Recreational hunting pressure has not adequately controlled deer numbers. Professional control is required.



Every year and every Budget the Government must weigh up a number of different priorities with the limited amount of funding available.

We will be releasing our election manifesto later this year that will detail our priorities in the conservation space.



Yes, National passed the Game Animal Council Act (2013) into law. Since then, the Game Animal Council has grown in stature and

demonstrated they, along with hunters can play a constructive role in the management of hunting and game animals. National will give the Game Animal Council a greater say in respect of game animal hunting and management of game animals.

Will your party work with the Game Animal Council to identify, designate, establish and resource the first herds of special interest as a hunter-led management tool and as provided for in the Game Animal Council Act?



Yes – ACT's goal is a constructive and cooperative relationship between the hunting and tramping communities, DOC, and the wider public. ACT will ensure that DOC management of conservation land, including national parks, must include the main users of those parks, including hunters and trampers. ACT are committed to empowering the GAC to establish Herds of special interest under direct GAC management.



It is a higher priority to ensure effective control of feral pigs, deer, goats and other ungulates to enable a recovery in forest health and in the condition of alpine vegetation and habitats.

The legislation requires any proposals for a herd of special interest to be developed by third parties, not the Department of Conservation.



The Labour Party is open to engagement with the Game Animal Council regarding the development of herd management plans.



Yes, Under the Act, the Government can designate 'Herds of Special Interest'. HOSI allows intensive management of game animals in specific locations for the benefit of hunters and conservation. National will designate Wapiti, Sika and Tahr as herds of special interest. Hunting groups such as the Fiordland Wapiti Foundation who manage Wapiti in their area are already seeing results that are better for conservation, environmental and recreation outcomes. This is a good example of how hunter led initiatives provide positive outcomes.



Adequate public access and facilities, e.g., huts and tracks, are crucial for hunters wishing to access game animal hunting opportunities, provide fresh wild meat for their communities and assist with management. Would your party consider a review of public access and facilities on public conservation land as well as a review of the Walking Access Act to ensure that Herenga ā Nuku Aotearoa, the Outdoor Access Commission has the appropriate powers to ensure adequate public access to public conservation land?



Yes. Recreational access to public conservation land is a right for all New Zealanders.

Tramping, hunting, fishing or gathering kai, are a core part of what it is to be a Kiwi. These things are part of the social fabric of New Zealand - the abundance of outdoors access is one of the defining features of our country. ACT will ensure that DOC has, in addition to its priority of preservation of the natural environment in public conservation land, a second priority of ensuring safe recreational access to public conservation land. This includes ensuring that tracks and huts are safe and suitable for use for trampers, tourists, hunters and fishers. ACT have expressed concern at the burning of huts and run down of tracks in Te Urewera, poor management, and the lack of DOC accountability.



The Green Party supports improving public walking access across private land to enable hunters and other recreational users to access

conservation land and increased funding and powers for the Outdoor Access Commission. It opposes DoC plans for "divestment" of recreational assets and facilities. Other options exist such as increasing conservation funding including funding for the Backcountry Trust where volunteers help maintain the hut and track network.



We remain committed to ensuring all New Zealanders can access the backcountry in order to enjoy our natural environment.



Yes, National will ensure managed access to public land for hunters and fishers is protected.

Historically New Zealanders have enjoyed access to public land and with this access has come rights and responsibilities. However, many hunters and fishers feel that over time these rights have been eroded. National believes in private property rights but will work with all interested parties to ensure the Walking Access Act and the Outdoor Access Commission work effectively. National will also establish the Huts of Recreational Importance Partnership between the Department of Conservation and volunteer clubs. There are over 900 back country huts that support hunting and fishing and to relieve some of the burden from DOC, volunteers from various organisations such as Backcountry Trust, Federated Mountain Clubs and NZDA branches should be able to help with hut maintenance. In return for their services these clubs should have some say in the use of these huts.

Fair and practical firearms rules are extremely important to hunters. Is your party willing to reconsider rules that may impose impractical and unworkable compliance for hunters, hunting clubs and shooting ranges and that do not make a measurable difference to public safety?



Yes. ACT has been a consistent campaigner for fair and practical regulation of firearms.

Nicole McKee is at No.3 on the ACT Party list, ensuring a vote for ACT will ensure a strong voice for firearms owners and hunters in Government. ACT were the only party who opposed the rushed firearms legislation of 2019. The firearms legislation made in 2019 and 2020 has failed New Zealand and

hasn't kept us safe, just as ACT outlined at the time. Now, ACT commits to undoing the harm that has been caused by Labour's knee jerk reactions and allow our hunters to get back to hunting and gathering for their table, while they work through the cost of living crisis. ACT have fully committed to reforming NZ's firearms laws to make them fairer and safer to the benefit of all New Zealanders.



We need to reduce the risk of anyone becoming a victim of firearms crime.

The Green Party supports recent law changes to improve firearms safety while still allowing for the lawful possession and use of firearms for hunting, food/kai gathering, pest/animal management, and sport and recreation. The firearms registry links firearms to licence holders and provides a picture of all the legally held firearms across New Zealand for the first time. This will allow Police to better trace firearms.



We did not receive a response to this question.



Yes, Labour's restructure of firearms law has added layers of compliance and cost

for hunters, pest controllers, and responsible firearms users. In many cases these changes they have made, particularly for ranges and clubs, are expensive and have not driven better safety outcomes. National will review all recent firearms policy decisions by the Labour government to ensure they have improved public safety and make sure that costs are kept down for responsible firearms users. We will invite the firearms community to be part of this process.

The NZ Game Animal Council is a statutory organisation working to improve the management of game animals and hunting for recreation, communities, commerce and conservation.



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The competition is running from 1 August to 26 November 2023

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Wild goats are rife throughout New Zealand, and they do some serious damage to farmlands and natural ecosystems. Although not considered traditional game animals, wild goats present a valuable opportunity to develop hunting skills and contribute to conservation efforts. Safety and ethics are paramount, with participants urged to prioritize humane and responsible hunting practices.

The competition is brought to you by the Department of Conservation and the New Zealand Deerstalkers Association, supported by Federated Farmers of NZ (Inc) and Hunting & Fishing Ltd. Prepare for an unforgettable experience where camaraderie, skill, and love for the outdoors converge. Join us in the National Wild Goat Hunting Competition and make a positive impact while showcasing your hunting skills.

Visit doc.govt.nz/wild-goat-hunting-competition for more information on how to enter.

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- 1. A New Range:** Back Country Cuisine will release a new high energy range. These packs will not only celebrate the company's history but also showcase its latest culinary innovations.
- 2. Outdoor Adventure Giveaway:** Back Country Cuisine will launch a social media competition, offering prizes to lucky participants. Winners will have the opportunity to kit themselves out with the latest gear from their favourite stockist of Back Country Cuisine.
- 3. Community Outreach:** Demonstrating its commitment to the New Zealand outdoors, Back Country Cuisine is proud to support raising funds via its website for the following organisations:
 - **Fiordland Wapiti Foundation:** guardians of Fiordland National Park, which is part of Te Wāhipounamu - South West New Zealand World Heritage Area.
 - **Land Search and Research:** who this year are celebrating 90 years of helping the lost, the missing and the injured.
 - **The Te Araroa Trail:** an inspiring, iconic trail spanning the length and diversity of Aotearoa.
- 4. Recipe Contest:** Back Country Cuisine will host a recipe contest, inviting its loyal customers to share their favourite recipes using Back Country Cuisine meals. The winning recipes will be featured on the company's website and social media platforms, offering participants a chance to showcase their creativity and culinary expertise.

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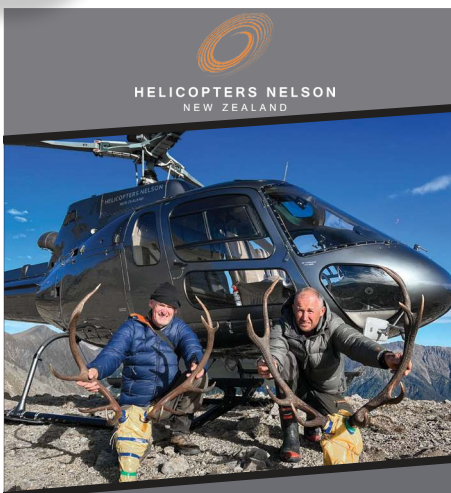
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WRITTEN BY ~ RICHARD HINGSTON

SO, YOU WANT TO SMOKE?

This is a big topic to cover so I will be covering it over the next three editions as we head into summertime

I am going to talk about smoking, slow-cook barbeque or barbeque smokers as there has been an increase in the popularity of this style of cooking.

In this edition, I will talk about choosing a smoker or barbeque as there are now so many options on the market.

To be transparent, I am not an expert on this topic. However, the information I will share with you comes from industry leaders who specialise in this style of cooking and a friend who has won competitions in New Zealand and qualified for the world championships in Texas. **Hopefully, this guide will assist you in choosing a product that you will be proud of, and you will enjoy cooking on it for your family and friends, resulting in tasty and beautifully cooked dishes.** I cannot advise you on what to buy, but I can provide you with a guide to help you make the best decision for yourself. Be careful not to share your decision too widely, as it may attract unexpected visitors popping around for a feed! It is important to understand that each option operates differently, so choose something that aligns with your skill level and capabilities.

The first thing you need to consider is the type of fuel for your needs.

Each type has its advantages and disadvantages, such as electric, charcoal, gas, or wood, among others.

Electric

Electric cookers are a convenient and simple way to cook, as they have thermostats and temperature controls that make them a set-and-forget style of appliance. Additionally, many of these cookers come with a bank of recipes already stored in them, making it easy to choose the right setting for your meal with just the press of a button. Depending on what you're cooking, you can even use pellets or moulded wood chips to add extra flavor to your dish.

Charcoal

Using charcoal for BBQ can be a bit challenging as it requires proper lighting and consistent airflow to maintain the right temperature range. You can purchase temperature controllers for your chimney at an extra cost if you wish. However, the smokier flavour of the food makes it worth the effort. You can also add wood chunks to enhance or change the flavour of the food.

Gas

Gas barbeques are easy to use, usually with a stable heat with the addition of wood chunks for flavour.

Pellet

The Pellet method of smoking involves using electric and sometimes gas to burn small wood pellets or discs. Simply place the pellets in a hopper and set the desired temperature. This method is easy and provides a great wood flavour. The thermometer control allows for low and slow cooking, making it easy to achieve perfect results.

The design of smokers might be "Offset", which refers to the fire box offset to the main chamber where the food is being cooked. The chamber can be horizontal and barrel-shaped. Charcoal or wood is used as the heat source, and this is probably the most popular with barbeque purists. They require attention to detail with regards to the heat and cooking – but the flavour and aroma are as one expects of the smoking process.

In vertical smokers, the heat source is at the bottom; thus the smoke rises up towards your food. This design is generally easy to control and manage the heat with possibly a water pan, cooking grates or smoke diffuser above the fuel source.

Another thing to take into consideration is the size of the cooking area. This will determine the size of your smoker so if you are regularly cooking for large numbers then look at the cooking space or number of shelves they have. Consider the mobility of your cooker and the

necessary space around it when planning to move it. It's important to think about its mobility and how easy it is to clean. Avoid pushing it into tight spots if you won't be able to retrieve it for cleaning purposes. Will you want to make it mobile so you can travel with it to a batch or hut or a competition? Size does matter!!

Lastly - budget!!! **The amount you spend on a barbeque may impact its performance.** Generally, a higher price means a larger cooking area, more functions, and better-quality materials, including insulation that can maintain a consistent temperature. This is especially important for winter and summer cooking and may require more fuel in cooler or windy conditions. However, it's possible to save money and still get a barbeque that meets your needs. Robust construction is key as cooking is corrosive. Would you prefer to invest in a durable unit that lasts for a substantial period, or opt for a cheaper model initially to test it out? Once you get the hang of it, you can then invest in a more practical

model with a long-term perspective and spend a significant amount of money. Check if the unit comes with a warranty and if replacement parts are available. Additionally, check if the discount is due to the model becoming obsolete? If you plan on keeping it outdoors in any weather conditions or storing it away during the winter, have you considered where you will store it? Alternatively, a waterproof cover may be a good option. Remember, this is an investment, so taking care of it will ensure years of enjoyment. If still unsure, then talk to retailers that sell different makes and models, or head to BBQ Direct who stock them all. **Look them up online if you don't live near Christchurch.** They are independent and will give you their honest opinion and help you out. If you are right into it, then the other option is to purchase direct from a builder such as Smoke Dogg Smokers in Kaiapoi or Octopit in Hamilton. I'm sure there are others but that's a start.

One more thing to note about

smoking or barbeque is that it is primarily associated with the United States, so it's important to be familiar with Fahrenheit and pounds.

If you're not accustomed to these units of measurement, it may be helpful to have a conversion table on hand as most information will be presented in this format. As I am supposed to contribute the recipes, I have included one in this article that will come in handy for smoking meats. This recipe is particularly delicious when used on pulled pork, chicken, shredded/pulled rabbit, or any other BBQ meat.

If you are serious then there are competitions throughout the country and would advise looking up Face Book for the SCA NZ (Steak Cook-Off Association) or the NZ BBQ Alliance.

And then if your meat sweats aren't enough and you want to learn more, check out Netflix and BBQ Chefs Table or in NZ - Series 2 of Cooks on Fire!!

CAROLINA SAUCE

Group A

- 1¼ cup yellow mustard
- ½ cup granulated or castor sugar
- ½ cup brown sugar
- ¾ cup cider vinegar
- ¼ cup water
- 1 Tbsp mild chilli powder

Group B

- A couple twists of the pepper grinder, of both white and black pepper
- 2 tsp soy sauce
- 3 Tbsp butter
- 1 Tbsp liquid smoke

Method

Combine all the ingredients from Group A into a saucepan and simmer on low for 20 minutes.

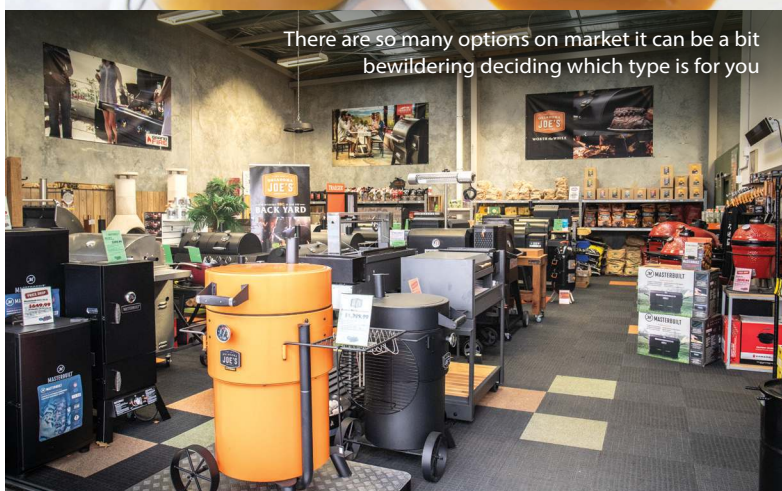
Stir occasionally to ensure it doesn't catch on the bottom

Add the remaining ingredients from group B and simmer for a further ten minutes

Remove from the heat and allow to cool before using

Store in the fridge in an airtight container for further use

If you like it spicy then add some cayenne at the start



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